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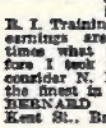

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"Zombies! Corpses kept alive by hideous sorcery to work and toil without food or water or pay."

While Zombies Walked

By THORP McCLUSKY

A tale of romance and stark horror, of dead men who worked in the fields, and an apostate preacher who sought love through witchcraft

THE Packard roadster had left the lowland and was climbing into the hills. It was rough going; this back road was hardly more than two deep grass-grown ruts—the car barely crawled. Overhead the vivid greenery of the trees nearly met, shrouding, intensifying the heat.

Eileen's letter had brought Anthony Kent down the Atlantic seaboard, his heart

leaden, his thoughts troubled. There had been a strangeness in Eileen's brusk dismissal.

"Tony," the letter had read, "you must not come to see me this summer. You must not write to me any more. I do not want to see you or hear from you again."

It had not been like Eileen—that letter; Eileen would at least have been gentle. It was as though that letter had been dictated by a stranger, as though Eileen had been but a puppet, writing words which were not her own. . . .

"Back in the hills a ways," an emaciated, filthy white man, sitting on the steps of a dilapidated shack just off the through highway, had said sourly, in answer to Tony's inquiry. But Tony, glancing at his speedometer, saw that he had already come three and seven-tenths miles. Had the man deliberately misdirected him? After that first startled glance there had been a curious flat opacity in the man's eyes. . . .

Abruptly, rounding a sharp bend in the narrow road, the car came upon a small clearing, in the heart of which nestled a tiny cabin. But at a glance Tony saw that the cabin was deserted. No smoke curled from the rusty iron stovepipe, no dog lay panting in the deep shade, the windows stared bleakly down the road.

Yet a planting of cotton still struggled feebly against the lush weeds! This was the third successive shack on that miserable road that had been, for some strange reason, suddenly abandoned. The peculiarity of this circumstance escaped Tony. His thoughts, leaden, bewildered, full of the dread that Eileen no longer loved him, were turned too deeply inward upon themselves.

It had been absurd of Eileen—throwing up her job with the Lacey-Kent people to rush off down here the instant she heard of her great-uncle's stroke. Absurd, because she could have done more for the old fellow by remaining in New York.

And yet old Robert Perry had raised his dissolute nephew's little girl almost from babyhood, had put her through Brenau College; Tony realized that Eileen's gesture had been the only one compatible with her nature.

But why had she jilted him?

The woebegone shack had merged into the forest. The road, if anything, was growing worse; the car was climbing a gentle grade. Now, as it topped the rise, Tony saw outspread before his eyes a small valley, hemmed in by wooded hills. A rambling, pillared house, half hidden by mimosa and magnolias, flanked by barns, outbuildings, and a tobacco shed, squatted amid broad, level acres lush with cotton.

At first glance the place seemed peculiarly void of life. No person moved in the wide yard surrounding the house; no smoke curled from the fieldstone chimney. But as Tony's gaze swept the broad, undulating fields he saw men working, men who were clad in grimy, dirt-grayed garments that were an almost perfect camouflage. Only a hundred feet down the road a man moved slowly through the cotton.

Tony stopped the car opposite the man.

"Is this the Perry place?" he called, his voice sharp and distinct through the afternoon's heat and stillness.

But the gray-clad toiler never lifted his gaze from the cotton beneath his eyes, never so much as turned his head or paused in his work to signify that he had heard.

Tony felt anger rising in him. His nerves were taut with worry, and he had driven many miles without rest. At least the fellow could leave off long enough to give him a civil answer!

But then, the man might be a little deaf. Tony shrugged, jumped from the car and plowed through the cotton.

"Is this the Perry place?" he bawled.

The man was not more than six feet from Tony, working toward him, with low-

ered head and shadowed face. But if he heard, he gave no sign.

Sudden, blind rage swept Tony. Had his nerves not been almost at the snapping-point he would never have done what he did; he would have let the man's amazing boorishness pass without a word, would have turned back to his car in disgust. But Tony, that day, was not himself.

"Why, you——" he choked. He took a sudden step forward, jerked the man roughly erect.

For an instant Tony glimpsed the man's eyes, gray, sunken, filmed, expressionless as though the man were either blind or an idiot. And then the man, as if nothing had occurred, was once more slumping over the cotton!

"God Almighty!" Tony breathed. And suddenly a chill like ice pressing against his spine swept him, sent his mind swirling and his knees weakly buckling.

The man wore a shapeless, broad-brimmed hat, fastened on his head by a band of elastic beneath his chin. But the savage shaking Tony had given him had jolted it awry.

Above the man's left temple, amid the gray-flecked hair, jagged splinters of bone gleamed through torn and discolored flesh! And a grayish ribbon of brain-stuff hung down beside the man's left ear!

That man was working in the cotton—with a fractured skull!

2

TONY'S thoughts were reeling, his mind dazed. How that man could continue to work with his brains seeping through a hole in his head was a question so unanswerable he did not even consider it. And yet, dimly, he remembered the almost miraculous stories that had come out of the war, stories of men who had lived with bullet-holes through their heads and with shell fragments imbedded inches deep within their brain-cases. Something like that must have happened to this man. Some horrible accident must have numbed or destroyed every spark of intelligence in him, must have bizarrely left him with only the mechanical impulse to work.

He must be taken to the house at once, Tony knew. Gently Tony grasped his shoulders. And in the midafternoon's heat his nerves crawled.

The stooping body beneath the frayed cotton shirt was snake-cold!

"Lord—he's dying—standing on his feet!" Tony mumbled.

The man resisted Tony's efforts to direct him toward the car. As Tony pushed him gently, he resisted as gently, turning back toward the cotton. As Tony, gritting his teeth, grasped those cold shoulders and tugged with all his strength, the man hung back with a strange, weird tenaciousness.

Suddenly Tony released his grip. He was afraid to risk stunning the man with a blow, for a blow might mean death. Yet, strong as he was, he could not budge the man from the path he was chopping along the cotton.

There was only one thing to do. He must go to the house and get help.

Stumbling, his mind vague with horror, Tony made his way to the car, sent it hurtling the last half-mile down the narrow road to the house.

Only subconsciously, as he plunged up the uneven walk between fragrant, flowering shrubs, did he notice the strange discrepancy between the well-kept appearance of the fields and the dilapidation of the house. His mind was too full of the plodding horror he had seen. But the windows of the house were almost opaque with dirt, and at some of them dusty curtains hung limply while others stared nakedly blank. The screens on the long low porch were torn and rusted as though they had received no attention since spring; the lawn and the shrubbery were unkempt.

Three or four dust-gray wicker chairs stood along the porch. In one of those chairs sat a man.

He was old, and sparsely built. Had he been standing erect he would have measured well over six feet, but he lay back in his chair with his legs extending supinely before him. Tony knew instantly that this was Eileen's great-uncle, Robert Perry.

As he plunged up the dirt-encrusted steps Tony exclaimed hoarsely, "Mr. Perry? I'm Tony Kent. There's a man——"

The old man was leaning slightly forward in his chair. His blue eyes in his deeply lined face had suddenly flamed.

"Have you got a gun?" The words were taut and low.

"No." Tony shook his head impatiently. His mind was full of the horror he had seen working back there in the field. A gun! What did he want of a gun? Did old Robert Perry think he would be dangerous—the story-book rejected-lover type, perhaps? Nonsense. Urgent, staccato words tumbled from his lips as he ignored the question:

"Mr. Perry—there's a man back there with the whole top of his head split open. He's stark mad; he wouldn't speak to me or come with me. But—he'll die if he's left where he is! It's a wonder he isn't dead already."

There was a long silence before the old man answered. "Where did you see this man?"

"Back there—back in the cotton."

Old Robert Perry shook his head, spoke in a muttered whisper, as if to himself, "Die? He can't—die!"

Abruptly he paused. The screen door leading into the house had opened. Two Negroes and a white man had come out on the porch.

The two Negroes were nondescript enough—mere plantation blacks. But the white man! . . .

He was tall and wide as a door. He was so huge that any person attempting to guess his weight would have considered himself lucky if he got the figure within a score of pounds of the truth; he was bigger than any man Tony had ever seen outside of a sideshow. And he was not a glandular freak; he was muscled like a jungle beast; his whole posture, the whole carriage of him, silently shrieked superhuman vitality. His gargantuan face, beneath the broad-brimmed, rusty black hat he wore, was pale as the belly of a dead fish, pale with the pallor of one who shuns the sunlight. His eyes were wide-set, coal-black, and staring; Tony had glimpsed that same intensity of gaze before in the eyes of religious and sociological fanatics. His nose was fleshy and well-muscled at the tip; his lips were thin and straight and tightly compressed. Garbed as he was in a knee-length, clerical coat of greenish, faded black, still wearing a frayed, filthy-white episcopal collar, he looked what he must have been, a pastor without a congregation, a prophet without honor, a renegade man of God.

He stood silently there on the porch and looked disapprovingly at Tony. His thin, weak, reformer's lips beneath that powerful, sensual nose tightened. Then, quietly, he spoke, not to Tony but to the paralytic old man:

"Who is this—person, Mr. Perry?"

TONY'S fists clenched at the man's insolence. His anger turned to astonishment as he heard the old man answer almost cringingly:

"This is Anthony Kent, Reverend Barnes—Anthony Kent, from New York City. Anthony—the Reverend Warren Barnes, who is stopping with us for a while. He has been very kind to us during my—illness."

Tony nodded coldly. The funereal-clad colossus stared for a long moment at this unexpected guest, and Tony could feel the

menace smoldering in him like banked fires. But when he spoke for the second time his words were innocuous enough.

"I'm temporarily in charge here." His voice was vibrant as a great hollow drum. "Mr. Perry's mind, since he suffered his most unfortunate stroke, has not always been entirely clear, and Miss Eileen—too, I am temporarily without a pastorate, and I am glad to help in any way that I can. You understand, I'm sure?" He smiled, the sickeningly pious smile of the chronic hypocrite, and ostentatiously clasped his hands.

Again Tony nodded. "Yes, I understand, Reverend," he said quickly, although some obscure sixth sense had already warned him that this man was as slimy and dangerous as a water-moccasin — and as treacherous. But—that man in the field, working in the cotton with the brain-stuff hanging down behind his ear! Hurriedly Tony went on, "I spoke to Mr. Perry when I came up the steps—something must be done at once—there's a man working out there in the field beside the road with something seriously wrong with his head. My God, I looked at him, and it looked to me as though his skull was fractured!"

With surprising swiftness the colossus turned upon Tony.

"What's that you say? It looked as though *what?*"

Bruskly Tony rasped, "A man working in the field with a fractured skull, Reverend! His head looks staved in—bashed open—God knows how he can still work. He's got to be brought to the house."

The giant's too brilliant, too intense black eyes were suddenly crafty. He laughed, patronizingly, as though humoring a child or a drunkard.

"Oh, come, come, Mr. Kent; such things are impossible, you know. A trick of the light, or perhaps your weariness; you've driven a long distance, haven't you?—one's eyes play strange tricks upon one."

He peered at Tony, and suddenly the expression on his face changed. "But if you're worried, we'll convince you, put your mind at ease. You go and get Cullen, Mose and Job. Jump smart, niggers!" He pointed up the road. "Jump smart; bring Cullen back here; Mr. Kent's got to be shown." His thin lips curled scornfully.

The two Negroes "jumped smart." The Reverend Warren Barnes calmly seated himself in one of the wicker chairs near paralytic old Robert Perry and waved carelessly toward a vacant chair. Tony sat down — glanced inquiringly at Eileen's uncle. But the aged man remained silent, apathetic, indifferent. Obviously, Tony thought, his mind *was* enfeebled; in that, at least, the Reverend Barnes had been truthful.

Almost diffidently Tony addressed the white-haired old paralytic.

"I've come here to speak with Eileen, Mr. Perry. I can't believe that she meant —what she wrote in her last letter. Regardless of whether or not her feelings toward me have changed, I must speak to her. Where is she?"

When the old man spoke his voice was flat and hard.

"Eileen has written to tell you that she wished to terminate whatever—had been between you. Perhaps she has decided that she would prefer not to become too deeply involved with a Northerner. Perhaps she has other reasons. But in any case, Mr. Kent, you are not acting the gentleman in coming here and attempting to renew an acquaintanceship that has been quite definitely broken off."

The words were brutal, and not at all the sort of speech Tony would have expected, a moment ago, from a man whose mind had dimmed through age and shock. A sharp, involuntary retort surged to Tony's lips. Suddenly, then, the Reverend Barnes guffawed loudly.

"There, Mr. Kent!" he chuckled. It was

a sound utterly unministerial, utterly coarse and sardonic and evil. "There—coming down the road. Is that the man you saw working in the cotton—with the fractured skull?"

Walking into the yard between the two Negroes was the white man Tony had encountered earlier. He was plodding along steadily, almost rapidly, with no assistance from his colored companions. The straw hat was set tightly down upon his head, shading his face and covering his temples. There was no bit of grayish stuff hanging down beside his left ear.

THE three men halted before the porch. The Reverend Barnes, grinning broadly, showing great, yellowed, decaying teeth, stood up and put his hands on the porch rail. Abruptly he spoke to Tony.

"Is this the man, Mr. Kent?"

Tony, his mind numb with amazement, answered, "It's the man, all right."

The Reverend Barnes' grin deepened. "Are you all right, Cullen? Do you feel quite able to work? Not ill, or anything?"

There was a long, long pause before the man answered. And when at last he spoke, his voice was curiously cadenceless, as though speech were an art he seldom practised. But there was no doubt about what he said.

"Ahm all right, Reverend Barnes. Ah feels good."

The big man chuckled, as though in appreciation of some ghastly joke.

"You haven't any headache?" he persisted. "No dizziness from the sun, perhaps? You don't want to knock off for the rest of the day?"

After a moment the reply came.

"Ah ain' got no haidache. Ah kin work."

The Reverend Barnes smiled pontifically. "Very well, then, Cullen. You may go back to work."

"Wait!" Tony exclaimed. "Tell him to take off his hat."

The big man wheeled slowly; slowly his right hand lifted, like that of some mighty patriarch about to pronounce a benediction—or a damning curse. For an instant Tony glimpsed murder in his eyes. Then his hand fell, and he spoke smoothly, quietly, to Cullen.

"Take off your hat, Cullen."

With maddening, mechanical slowness the man lifted his hat, and Tony saw a mat of iron-gray hair, caked with dirt.

"Put your hat back on, Cullen. You may go back to work."

The man turned, was plodding slowly from the yard. And in that instant, striking vaguely against his dazed consciousness, the realization came to Tony that only the hair on the left side of the man's skull was matted with ground-in dust—the hair above his right ear was relatively clean! He opened his lips to speak. But the Reverend Barnes, as if anticipating him, was saying with amused, contemptuous finality:

"He's gone back to work. Dirty fellows, aren't they — these poor white trash?"

And Tony, wondering if his own reason were tottering, let the man go. . . .

The big man settled comfortably back in his chair.

"You thought you saw something you didn't," he said. His voice was soft now, soft and tolerant as silk. "Eye-strain, nervousness that's very close to hysteria. You must look after yourself."

For an instant Tony cradled his face in his hands. Yes, he must get hold of himself; his mind was overwrought.

He raised his head and looked at the old man.

"Eileen," he said doggedly. "I must see her."

Old Robert Perry opened his lips to speak. And suddenly the big man turned in his chair to stare deeply into the aged paralytic's eyes.

"You would like to see Miss Eileen?"

he asked Tony, then, with grave courtesy. "But certainly, Mr. Perry. He's come such a distance; it would be a pity——"

"Whatever you say."

The Reverend Barnes rose from his chair, smiled sorrowfully and pityingly toward Tony.

"Job, Mose," he said to the two Negroes, "stay here on the porch, in case Mr. Perry has one of his spells." He nodded significantly to Tony. "I'll call Miss Eileen. Such a lovely, sweet girl!"

Leisurely, moving on the balls of his feet like some magnificent jungle beast, he rose and stalked across the porch, opened the rusty screen door and disappeared within the house.

Mr. Perry did not speak; neither did Tony. There was something in the air that eluded him, Tony knew—some mystery that even Mr. Perry himself concealed, some mystery that seemed as elusive as the little winds stirring the magnolias.

FOOTSTEPS within the house, and Eileen Perry, small, slender, with the wistful beauty of a spring flower, came onto the porch. Behind her, as if carelessly, his face overspread with a pious smirk, lounged by Reverend Barnes.

Tony started up eagerly.

"Eileen!"

For a moment she did not speak. Only her splendid eyes looked at him hungrily, with ill-concealed terror rising in their depths.

"You shouldn't have come, Tony," she said then, simply.

The words were a rebuff. Yet Tony fancied that he had seen her hands lift toward him. He took a single step forward. But, as if to elude him, she stepped swiftly to the rail, stood with her back toward him.

"I *had* to come, Eileen," Tony said. His voice sounded oddly choked. "I love you. I had to know if you meant—those words you wrote, or if it was some strange madness——"

"Madness?" She laughed, and there was sudden hysteria in her low contralto voice. "Madness? No. I've changed, Tony. You may think what you please about me; you may think that I'm fickle, or that I'm insane—whatever you will. But—above everything else in the world I did not want you to come here. Is that plain enough for you? I thought I tried to tell you that in my letter. And now—I wish that you would go."

As a man who dreams a nightmare, Tony heard his own voice, muttering, "But don't you *love me*, Eileen?"

For a moment he believed that she would speak, but she did not. She turned, and, without a backward look, walked into the house.

The giant, Reverend Barnes, was rubbing his big hands together—an incongruous, absurd gesture in a man of his physique. And then, after a moment, he laughed, a hoarse, obscene guffaw. But Tony, heartbroken, heard the insulting sound as no more than a disquieting rumble that had no meaning. His lips quivering, his eyes misty with the sudden tears he could not restrain, he walked slowly across the porch.

Then, as though the longing in them could bring her back to him, his tear-dimmed eyes gazed into the emptiness where Eileen had stood, looked unseeingly across the flowering mimosa, stared downward for a second at the porch rail.

A single word had been written on that rail, written in dust with a fingertip. Tony's mind did not register the significance of that word; it was transmitted only to his subconscious. But, as if mechanically, his lax lips moved.

The somberly clad giant suddenly tensed, took a step forward.

"What was that you said, Mr. Kent?"

Mechanically Tony repeated the word.

The big man's eyes swept the rail. The grin had abruptly gone from his face; his muscles knotted beneath his rusty black coat.

And then he leaped. And simultaneously leaped the two Negroes who had lingered, diffidently, down the porch.

Monstrous, spatulate, pasty-white hands clenched into Tony's throat. Abruptly fighting, not with his numbed brain, but with a primitive, involuntary instinct of the flesh for self-preservation, Tony sent his fists lashing into the pair of black faces before him. But the giant renegade minister was on his shoulders like an albino, shrouded leopard; the negroes were tearing at his arms. His knees were buckling.

Like a slender tree stricken by the woodsman's ax, he wavered and plunged headlong. There was a cascade of darting light as his head crashed against the dusty pine boards. Then came oblivion.

3

ANTHONY KENT awoke to swirling, throbbing pain. His skull beat and hammered; the dim walls of a small room, barren save for the straw-mattressed cot on which he lay, swooped and gyrated before his eyes.

Slowly he recalled what had occurred. The Reverend Barnes, that magnificent jackal, had struck him down as he stood on the porch. He was in some long-disused room, presumably a servant's bedchamber, within the old Perry house.

A word was struggling upward from deep within his brain. What was that word? Almost he remembered it. It was the word Eileen had written in dust on the porch rail, a word repulsive and hideous.

Eileen had been trying to tell him something, trying to convey some message to him. Eileen, then, loved him!

What was the word?

There was a small, square window in the room, through which a feeble, yellowish light struck high up on the opposite wall. The sun was setting, then; he had been unconscious for hours. But it was not at the window that Tony glanced despairingly. It was at the two-by-six pine beams nailed closely together across that small square space!

Tony stumbled to his feet, reeled to the window and shook those wooden bars with all his strength. But they were solid white pine, and they had been spiked to the house with twenty-penny nails.

Through the narrow apertures between the beams Tony could see the broad, level fields, and the road, sloping gently upward to disappear within the encircling forest.

People were coming down that road now, gray, dusty people who plodded toward the house. They appeared almost doll-like, for the room in which Tony was imprisoned was on the side of the house, and long before the road swung in toward the yard they passed beyond his vision. But as Tony watched them his nerves crawled.

They walked so slowly, so listlessly, with dragging footsteps! And they stumbled frequently against one another, and against the stones in the road, as though they were almost blind. Almost they walked like soldiers suffering from shell-shock, but recently discharged from some hospital in hell.

For many were maimed. One walked with a deep, broken stoop, as though his chest had been crushed against his backbone. Another's leg was off below the knee, and in place of an artificial limb he wore a stick tied against the leg with rope, a stick that reached from twelve inches beyond the stump to the hip. A third had only one arm; a fourth was skeleton-thin.

In the Name of God whence had these maimed toilers come?

And then a soundless scream rattled in

Tony's throat; for, coming down the road alone, walking with the same dragging lifelessness as did the others, was another of the gray toilers. And, as the man turned the wide sweep in the road that would lead him to the house and beyond Tony's vision, Tony glimpsed, in the last yellow rays of the setting sun, the horror that had once been his face!

Had once been his face! For, from beneath the ridge of his nose downward, *the man had no face!* The vertebrate whiteness of his spine, naked save for ragged strings of dessicated flesh, extended with horrid starkness from the throat of his shirt to merge with the shattered base of a bony skull!

4

HIDEOUS minutes passed, minutes through which Tony fought to retain some semblance of sanity. At last he staggered weakly to the door, only one thought in his mind—to escape that mad place and take Eileen with him.

But the door, like the bars across the window, was made of heavy pine. From its resistance to his assault Tony knew that it was secured by bars slotted through iron sockets. It was impregnable.

Darkness was within that room now. Night had come quickly with the setting of the sun, velvety, semi-tropical night. The window was a purplish square through which a star gleamed brilliantly; the pine bars were invisible in the gloom. Tony was engulfed in blackness.

Yet, in a corner near the floor, there was a lessening of the darkness. Tony, crouching there, saw that the light came through a quarter-inch crack between the planks. Throwing himself prone, he glued his eyes to that crack.

He could see only a small portion of the room beneath him, a rectangle roughly three feet by twelve, yet that was enough to tell him that the room was the dining-room of the old house. The middle of an oaken table, littered with dishes and scraps of food, bisected his field of vision.

At that table, his back toward Tony, sat the apostate Reverend Barnes. A little way down the table a black hand and arm appeared and disappeared with irregular frequency. The rumble of voices floated upward through the narrow slit.

"God!" Tony thought. "If only I had a gun!"

He remembered, then, that the old paralytic had asked him if he had a gun.

From the mutter of voices Tony guessed that there were three men seated about that table; the two Negroes were talking volubly yet with a low, curious tenseness; the Reverend Barnes interrupting only infrequently with monosyllabic grunts. All three seemed waiting.

Beside the big man's pallid white hand, on the naked oaken table, sprawling disjointedly amid soggy bits of bread and splotches of grease and chicken bones, lay an incongruous object, a little doll that had been wretchedly sewn together from dissimilar bits of cotton cloth. It possessed a face, crudely drawn with black grease or charcoal, and a tuft of kinky hair surmounted the shapeless little bag that represented its head. Obviously it caricatured a Negro.

From time to time, hunching over the table like a great gross idol, his shiny, worn clerical coat taut across his massive shoulders, the renegade minister would pick up the little rag doll, flop its lax arms and legs about, and put it down again.

Suddenly, then, a door, invisible to Tony, opened and closed. The conversation of the two Negroes abruptly ceased. Two black men shuffled slowly across the dining-room floor, came close to the table, opposite the colossus. Tony could see them both.

The face of one was rigid and grim, and he held his companion firmly by the arm.

The second Negro was swaying drunkenly. His lips were loose and his eyes bleared. Yet there was terror in him.

The Reverend Barnes hunched lower over the table. Tony could see the big muscles in his back ribbing beneath his rusty coat, and the big brass collar-button at the back of his pillar-like neck.

"You're here at last, nigger?" he asked softly. "You're late. What delayed you? They came from the cotton a long time ago, we have already eaten supper."

The drunken man mouthed some reply that was unintelligible, terror-ridden.

The giant's shoulders seemed to tighten into a ball of muscle.

"You're drunk, nigger," he said, and his voice trembled with contemptuous loathing. "I smell corn liquor on your breath. It stifles me; how any man can so degrade himself—'Look not upon the wine when it is red.'" He paused. "You fool; I told you not to drink. How can you stay down the road and watch for strangers if you're drunk? You can't be trusted to wave the sheet when you're drunk. You failed today. What have you to say for yourself?"

Words tumbled from the man's slobbering mouth.

"Ahm not drunk. Ah tuk de cawn foh toofache——"

The giant shrugged.

"A stranger came up the road today before we could hide them in the cotton. You're drunk, nigger. I have forgiven you twice. But this is the third time."

He picked up the little doll.

"This is you, nigger. This is made with your sweat and your hair——"

A scream burst from the man's throat. He had begun to shake, horribly.

"Hold him, niggers," the giant said imperturbably. "I want to study this; I want to watch it work."

Black hands grasped the writhing, shuddering man.

The Reverend Barnes picked up a fork. He was holding the little doll in his left hand, looking at it speculatively. And it seemed to Tony—although it may have been a trick of the light—that the lifeless doll writhed and moved of itself, in ghastly synchronization with the trembling and shuddering of the terror-maddened human it caricatured.

Carefully, the Reverend Barnes stuck a prong of the fork through a leg of the doll. There was a slight rending of cotton.

The shuddering wretch screamed—horribly! And the colossus nodded his head as if in satisfaction.

Again the fork probed into the doll. But this time the big man jabbed all four tines through the little doll's middle. And this time no scream, but only a gasping, rending moan came from the Negro so firmly held by the strong hands of his kind. And suddenly he was hanging limply there, like a slaughtered thing. . . .

The Reverend Barnes pulled the fork from the doll, tossed the torn doll carelessly on the floor.

"He's dead, niggers," he said then, callously. "He's stone dead."

5

AS TONY lay sprawled on that rough pine flooring, peering down with horrified fascination into the room below, the incredible realization grew and grew in him that he had witnessed the exercise of powers so primitive, so elemental, so barbaric that descendants of the so-called higher civilizations utterly disbelieve them.

God! Was this voodoo? Perhaps, but the Reverend Barnes was a white man; how had he become an adept? Was it something akin to voodoo, but deeper, darker? Had that wretched Negro died through fright, or had there really been some horrible affinity between his living body and the lifeless doll?

What of the thing without a face, walking down the road ?

The word that Eileen had written in dust on the porch rail was hammering at Tony's consciousness. Almost he grasped it, yet it eluded him. An unfamiliar word, reeking of evil. . . .

For a long time there was only silence from the room below—silence and a thickening haze of bluish smoke. The Negroes, Tony guessed,were smoking, although the big man almost directly beneath his eyes was not. Abruptly, then, the Reverend Barnes rose to his feet. Tony heard him walk across the floor; there was the sound of a door opening, and then a deep, throaty chuckle.

"No need for you to do the dishes tonight, Miss Eileen. Just leave them where they are; we don't need them any more. Come with me; I'm going to take you back to your room."

Tony heard the man padding heavily yet softly across the floor, and Eileen's reluctant, lighter footsteps. The dining-room door opened and closed.

Tony stumbled to his feet, then, shook the door with a despair that was almost madness. Exhausted at last, he clung limply to the iron latch, panting.

Minutes passed—minutes that seemed hours.

Suddenly, from close to his ears, Tony heard muffled sounds of sobbing. Eileen, crying as though her heart was broken, was imprisoned in the next room!

"Eileen!"

Abruptly the sobbing ceased.

"Tony!" The girl's voice came almost clearly into the room, as though she had moved close to the wall. "You didn't—escape them, Tony?"

"They ganged me," Tony said grimly. "I think they were going to let me go, but that big two-faced rattlesnake saw what you wrote on the porch rail. and then they jumped me."

There was a gasp from beyond the wall, and then a long silence. At last Eileen said, softly and penitently, "I'm sorry, Tony. I thought that you would read it and—understand—and come back later with help. I'm sorry that I got you into—this, Tony. I tried to keep you out. But when you came here I—I loved you so, and I wanted so terribly to escape. I had a wild hope that when you got safe away, even though you didn't understand, you would ask someone who knew and could tell you what *zombies* meant——"

Zombies! That was the word she had written in dust on the porch rail! And instantly, with kaleidoscopic clarity, there flashed across Tony's brain a confusion of mental images he had acquired through the years—an illustration from a book on jungle rites—a paragraph from a voodoo thriller—scenes from one or two fantastic motion pictures he had witnessed. . . .

Zombies! Corpses kept alive by hideous sorcery to work and toil without food or water or pay—mindless, dead things that outraged Nature with every step they took! These were zombies, the books glibly said, grim products of Afro-Haitian superstition. . . .

The men who wrote those books had never suggested that zombies might be real—that the powers which controlled them might be an heritage of the blacks exactly as self-hypnotism is a highly developed faculty among the Hindoos. No, the books had been patronizingly written, with more than a hint of amused superiority evident in them; their authors had incredibly failed to understand that even savages could not practise elaborate rites unless there was efficacy in them. . . .

"Zombies!" Tony muttered dazedly. And then, eagerly, "But—you love me, Eileen? I knew it; I knew you couldn't mean those things you wrote——"

"*He* made me write them," Eileen whispered. "He—came here in the spring,

Tony. Uncle thinks that they ran him away—from wherever he was—before. He brought four Negroes with him.

"Uncle was old, Tony, and he didn't keep much help here—only six or seven colored men. The place was run down, Tony; after Uncle had put me through college he didn't have much incentive for keeping it up; he's always told me that I could have it for a sort of country home—after he died.

"But then—this man who said he had been a minister came, and saw all these unworked acres and how isolated the place was.

He went to Uncle, and told Uncle that he would furnish extra help if Uncle would give him half the crop.

"It was after the—*help* came that Uncle's Negroes left. Some of them even moved out of their shacks—out of the county. And this man—this *Reverend* Barnes, had already made a little doll and told Uncle that it was supposed to represent him. He tied the little doll's legs together with Uncle's hair, and told Uncle that with stiff legs Uncle wouldn't be able to run away and get help. He told Uncle that any time he wanted to he could stick a pin through the little doll and Uncle would die.

"And—*Uncle can't move his legs!* It's true, Tony, every word he said. That man, that—devil, can do anything he says.

"He read all my letters to Uncle, and all of Uncle's letters to me, too, before he sent them down to the postoffice. He tried to keep me from coming here.

"And when I did come he made another doll, Tony, to represent me. It's stuffed with my hair, Tony; they held me while he cut my hair. He's got little dolls that represent everyone here; he keeps them in a bag inside his shirt.

"He can kill us all, Tony, whenever he pleases!"

Hysteria had begun to creep into her voice. She paused for a moment. When she went on, her voice was calmer.

"He keeps one of his colored men as a lookout in a tree at the top of the hill. The man can see way down to the main road. When he sees anyone turn up this way he opens out a big sheet and they hide the—*help*——"

Tony chuckled grimly.

"He didn't open out the sheet today," he muttered. "He was drunk." He tried to make his voice sound confident. "Eileen, sweetheart—we'll have to get out of this. It shouldn't be impossible, if we can only keep calm and try and think."

There was a silence. Then Eileen's words came back with quiet, hopeless finality.

"We can't break out of these rooms, Tony. The house is too strongly built. And—I think that tonight he's going to do something dreadful to us. I think that he's afraid to stay here any longer. But before he leaves this place he's going to—Tony, I know that man! He's ruthless, and he's—mad. Sometimes I think that he was, really, a minister. But not now, not now. He's pure devil now!"

6

HOW long Tony and Eileen, with the terrible earnestness of despair, talked to each other through the wall that night, neither ever knew. But it must have been for hours, for they talked of many things, yet never of the horror that menaced them. And they spoke calmly, quietly, with gentle tenderness. . . .

Why should the doomed speak of that which they cannot evade?

Both knew that they were utterly in the giant madman's hands, to do with, save for a miracle, as he pleased. Both knew that the apostate minister was merciless. . . .

There was no moon. But it must have been close to midnight when Tony heard the footsteps of several men on the stairs,

the grating of the locks on Eileen's door, the sound of a brief, futile struggle, and then Eileen's despairing cry, "Good-bye, Tony, sweet——"

Frothing like a rabid beast, he hurled himself at the door, at the barred window, at the walls, beating at them with his naked fists until his knuckles were raw and numb and sweat poured in rivulets from his body.

Grim minutes passed. And then the footsteps returned. There was the sound of pine bars being withdrawn. Tony waited, crouching.

When they entered he leaped. But there was no strength in him—only a terrible, hopeless fury. Quickly they seized his arms, bound his hands firmly behind him with rope, dragged him, struggling impotently, down a steep flight of stairs, through the ground floor hall, and down a second flight of stairs, musty and noisome.

Here they paused for a moment while they fumbled with the latch of a door. At last the door swung open, and they dragged Tony forward into an immense, dimly illumined chamber. The door swung shut; the old-fashioned iron latch clicked.

This was the cellar of the plantation-house, an enormous, cavernous place, extending beneath the whole rambling structure. Once designed for the storage of everything necessary to the subsistence of the householders living on the floors above, its vast spaces were broken by immense, moldy bins. An eight-foot cistern loomed gigantically in a dark corner; wine shelves extended along one entire wall. The whole monstrous place had been dug half from the clayey soil and half from the solid rock; the floor underfoot, rough and uneven, was seamed and stratified rock.

Two oil lanterns, hanging from beams in the cowwebby ceiling, lighted no more than the merest fraction of that great vault; the farther recesses were shrouded in blackness.

The three Negroes—Mose, Job, and the man who had brought in the drunken lookout—waited expectantly, their black hands strong on Tony's arms. And suddenly Tony was a raging fury, tearing madly at those restraining hands. . . .

There in the center of the old cellar, kneeling over a small, fragile form lying still and motionless on the moldy rock, was the gigantic, black-clad Reverend Barnes!

That still, fragile form was Eileen!

At the sound of Tony's struggles the giant looked up, stood erect. Great beads of perspiration bedewed his unnaturally pallid forehead—yet there was a pursy, significant grin on his face.

"Hard work, this, Mr. Kent," he said genially. "Much harder work than you would think."

"What are you doing to her!"

There was exultant triumph in the booming reply.

"I am binding her with a spell, so that she will always do what I say. This is powerful obeah, Mr. Kent. I never dreamed——" He paused, while a swift dark shadow overspread his huge face, so strong and yet so weak. But the shadow passed as swiftly as it had come, and once again his eyes blazed with evil. "Within a few moments I shall put the same spell on you, also, so that you too will always do what I say."

Chuckling, he spoke to Tony's guards.

"Tie his feet securely and pitch him there by the wine-bin. I'll not want him until later."

With both his hands and feet tightly bound, the three Negroes dumped Tony down on the jagged rock beside the wine-bin. Tony's face was turned toward where the fallen minister squatted beneath the lanterns, a monstrous, Luciferian image.

"Sit down on the floor, niggers," he said slowly. "Relax and rest; there's no need to stand." The deep, resonant voice throbbed with kindliness. "I must think."

Obediently the three squatted in a row on their haunches, sat looking with silent expectation at this white conjur-man who was their master. . . .

THE frock-coated figure shook its head slowly, as though its brain were cobwebby. Then, slowly, it opened the front of its filthy linen shirt, baring the gray-white of its chest—the chest of a powerful and sedentary man, who yet had always shunned the healthful sunlight—the chest of a physical animal whose warped brain had, perhaps through most of its years, abhorred the physical as immoral and unclean. A bag hung there at the figure's chest, suspended by a cord around its neck. Two big hands dipped into that gaping pouch. . . .

Tony was struggling, struggling, rolling his body back and forth in straining jerks, trying to loosen the ropes that bound his feet and hands.

That bag of cotton dolls! One of those dolls represented Eileen.

Tony's shoulder crashed against the beams beneath the wine-bins, leaped with pain as an exposed nail tore the flesh. But the ropes held. . . .

The big man's forearms, beneath the shiny black coat, were suddenly bulging—and in that instant the three Negroes who had been squatting on their haunches were rolling and writhing on the floor, their hands clawing at their throats, their bodies jerking and twisting, their faces purpling, their eyes bulging!

Slow minutes passed. And still the giant, renegade minister crouched there, motionless, his big forearms knotted, his face drawn into a sardonic grimace.

The struggles of the three were becoming feebler. Their arms and legs were beating spasmodically, as though consciousness had gone from them. And at last even that spasmodic twitching ceased and they lay still.

Yet the Reverend Barnes did not stir.

But then, after it seemed to Tony that an eternity had passed, he withdrew his hands from the bag. In his left hand he held by the throat two little cotton dolls, in his right hand, one. With a careless gesture he tossed them to the floor, rose to his feet, and stood slowly flexing and unflexing his fingers. At last he stooped over the three motionless Negroes and grunted with satisfaction.

"Fools, to think that I would ever keep you after your work was done!" He was swaying slightly. Seemingly he had forgotten Tony.

But Tony was stealthily, warily sawing his bound hands back and forth, back and forth across the bit of nail that jutted from the base of the wine-bin. Strand by strand he was breaking the half-inch hemp.

The Reverend Barnes had returned to his position beside Eileen, was once more squatting beside her. She had not moved. But she lay unbound; the colossus was very sure of his sorcery!

For long minutes he sat motionless, his shoulders drooped, his muscles flaccid. At last, with a deep sigh, he raised his head and looked at Eileen.

"Beautiful, beautiful womanhood!" he whispered softly. "All my life I've wanted a woman like you——"

He reached out a big, splayed and unhealthily colorless hand, touched Eileen's body. Beneath his gentle touch she stirred and moaned.

And suddenly Tony was cursing him wildly.

"Damn you; you hound of hell in priest's clothing!"

The Reverend Barnes' huge hand paused in its caressing.

"You feel jealousy, Mr. Kent?"

Tony could not see the expression on the man's face; he was a black-robed bulk against the lantern-light. But there was a terrible gentleness in his voice.

"You filthy——" Tony choked. Words would no longer come to him; his rage was beyond words.

"Mr. Kent," the big man said softly, and Tony sensed that a slow, utterly evil smile was stealing across his face, "in a little while—such a little while—you'll no longer care what I do with her. You'll be beyond caring."

He swung about to face Tony.

"But—before I—dispose of you," he continued, with startling unexpectedness, "I'm going to tell you the—truth about myself. Why? Perhaps because I want to explain myself, to justify myself to myself. I don't know. Perhaps, in this moment, I have a sudden clear premonition of God's inevitable vengeance—for I am damned, Kent; I know full well that I am damned.

"I have been a preacher for twenty years, Kent. Not the soft-spoken, politically-minded type that ultimately lands the rich city churches; sin was too real to me for that; I fought the Devil tooth and claw.

"Perhaps that was the trouble. My ecclesiastical superiors were never certain of me. They thought of me as a sort of volcano that might explode at any time; I was unpredictable. And they suspected, too, I think, the devil in me—the physical lustiness and the desire for material things I fought so hard to stifle. They gave me only the poorest, back-country churches, they starved me; I was hungry for a mate and I could not even afford a wife. I think they hoped that I would fall into sin, so that they might thus be circumspectly rid of me.

"My last church was a pine shack twenty miles deep in a swamp. My parishioners were almost all Negroes—Negroes and a few whites so poverty-stricken that not one had ever seen a railway train or worn factory-made shoes. And inbreeding, in that disease-ridden country, was the rule, not the exception; you have no idea. . . .

"I worked, there in that earthly hell, like a madman. There was something there, something tangible, for me to fight—and I have always been a literal man. It was a shaman—what you would call a medicine-man or witch-doctor. He was, of course, a colored man.

"It may sound incredible, but I *competed* against that man for almost a year. We were exactly like rival salesmen. I sold faith, and enforced my sales with threats of hell-fire and damnation; he manufactured charms and love-potions, prophesied the future and healed the sick.

"Of course I went after him hammer and tongs. I blasted him in church; I ridiculed him; I told those poor ignorant people that his salves and his potions and his prophecies were no good. Eight months after I arrived there I began to feel that I was winning. . . .

"After about a year had passed he came to see me. We knew each other, of course; I will describe him—a very gentle old man, very tall, very thin and gray. He told me that he wanted me to go away. I think that he knew my weakness, the bitterness in me, better than I knew it myself.

"He raised no religious arguments; in fact, I don't think there were ever any really fundamental differences between us. You know that Holy Writ speaks of witches and warlocks and demons, and my chief objection to this man lay in my private conviction that he was a faker, a mumbo-jumbo expert pulling the wool over the eyes of fools. And, even though I am a fundamentalist, still, this is the Twentieth Century. The upshot of it was that I laughed at him and listened.

"He merely told me that if I would go away he would teach me his power. What power? I said. I should have known that he was trying to trap me—to strike a bargain. He looked at me. 'Among other things, to raise the dead, that they may do your bidding,' he said, very slowly and seri-

ously, 'although I have never myself done this obeah, because there has never been the need.'

"I laughed at him very loudly then, and for a long time.

" 'Well,' I told him, after I got my breath back, 'I am a pretty poor preacher—if the caliber of my parish offers any criterion whatever. Perhaps I am not destined for the life of a minister, after all. Certainly my superiors don't think so. Therefore, if you will teach me these things of which you speak, and if they work, I will never preach another word as long as I live. But, if they do not work, you will come to church on Sunday, and proclaim yourself a faker before the entire congregation.'

"I felt very sure of myself, then, and I expected him to attempt to avoid the showdown. But he only answered me, quietly and gravely, 'I am the seventh son of a seventh son. I will teach you the obeah my father taught me, and if it works you will go away.'

"So—and I will tell you that I kept my tongue in my cheek all the while—I learned the rituals he taught me, learned them word for word, and wrote them down, phonetically, on paper to his dictation.

"But—he had not lied!"

The black-clad giant paused, and Tony saw that he was trembling. Presently the trembling passed, and, in a quiet, colorless monotone, the apostate minister added, "I knew, then, that I was eternally damned."

Tony shook his head. "No. Give up this—madness. No man has ever had the power to—condemn his own soul!"

The colossus shook its head; Tony could see a sneer hardening on its lips.

"I'll—pay! Because I have, now, what I have always wanted—power! Power over other men—and women! Shall I tell you what I am presently going to do with you? I'm going to make you so that you will forget everything; you will walk and talk only when I tell you to; you will do only what I say. You have money; I will make you take your car, and drive Miss Eileen and me to New York. There you will go to the bank, or wherever it is you keep your money, and draw everything out for me. Then, once again, you will get in your car and drive, but this time you will be alone, and while you are driving I will stick a pin into a little doll. 'Heart-failure,' the doctors will say."

FOR a moment Tony did not speak. Then, with a strange steadiness, he asked: "But—Eileen?"

The big man chuckled. "You ask that question of a man who has denied himself women through all his life? Eileen will belong to me."

Abruptly, ignoring the bound, suddenly raging man on the floor beside the wine-bin, he turned away. But now, when again he squatted close to Eileen, he did not remain motionless. From somewhere about his clothing he produced a needle and thread, and bits of cloth, and he was sewing. And as he sewed he muttered strange words to himself, in a tongue Tony had never heard before, muttered those words in a cadenceless monotone, as though he himself did not understand them, but was repeating them by rote, as perhaps, they had been taught to him by some aged colored wizard. . . .

Tony's bound wrists rubbed back and forth, back and forth across the nail. Suddenly the strands binding his hands loosed.

Slowly, inch by inch, Tony hunched along the wine-bin, drawing up his feet. Warily he watched the big, crouching man; at any moment the Reverend Barnes might notice. . . .

But, seemingly, the colossus was too preoccupied.

In furtive, small strokes, Tony's ankles sawed across the nail.

Suddenly the apostate minister stood up. He was looking at his handiwork, a grotesque little thing of odds and ends, crudely sewn yet unmistakably, with its limp, flopping appendages, a doll. And then he grunted approvingly, came toward Tony with the doll in his left hand.

"I'll have to take a few strands of your hair," he said grimly. His right hand reached downward toward Tony's scalp.

And then Tony's hands lashed from behind his back, clutched the pillar-like legs, strained. Abruptly the colossus sprawled his length on the uneven rock, his hands outsplayed. The little doll slid unheeded across the cold stone.

Jackknifing his bound feet beneath him, Tony hurled himself across the floor. And with that tremendous effort the frayed ropes about his ankles ripped away.

Instantly he was atop the big man, his fingers sunk deep into the pasty white throat, his legs locked about giant hips.

But his antagonist's strength seemed superhuman. Only a half-hour before those spatulate hands, as surely as though they had been about black throats, had simultaneously strangled three men. Rope-like torso muscles tautened; powerful hands tore at Tony's forearms.

The powerful hands lifted, tightened about Tony's throat. And as those huge talons flexed, a roaring began in Tony's ears, red spots danced madly before his eyes, the dim cellar swirled and heaved.

The colossus, hands still locked about Tony's throat, surged slowly to his feet. Contemptuously he looked into Tony's bloodshot, staring eyes, hurled him reeling across the rock-gouged vault.

And in that instant something hard and sharp split the base of his skull like an intolerable lightning. Bright sparks spun crazily before his eyes—flickered out in utter blackness. He felt himself falling, falling into eternity. . . .

Old Robert Perry, his eyes blazing with inhuman hate, stood above the Reverend Barnes's sprawling corpse, watching the red blood dim the luster of the ax-blade he had sunk inches deep into the giant's skull!

"That hellish paralysis!" he was babbling, inanely. "That hellish paralysis—gone—just in time!"

7

OLD Robert Perry wheeled. In the feeble yellow light beneath the lantern he saw Eileen, awake now, huddled on the floor, pointing—her eyes pools of horror. And, following with his gaze her outstretched hand, he saw them, coming from the dark bins, the dead things the fallen minister had torn from their graves to toil in the cotton! They came pouring from those great bins with dreadful haste, their faces no longer stony and still, but writhing and tortured. And from the mouths of those that yet possessed mouths poured wild wailings.

Old Robert Perry was trembling—trembling.

"God!" he mumbled. "Their master's—dead, and now they seek their graves!"

Dimly, as one who dreams in fever, he saw them passing him, no longer with stumbling, hopeless footsteps, but hurriedly, eagerly, crowding one another aside in their haste to escape into the night and return to their graves. And the flesh on his back crawled, and loosed, and crawled again. . . .

The zombies, dead things no longer beneath the fallen giant's unholy spell, twisted, broken, rotted by the diseases that had killed them, seeking the graves from which they had been torn!

"God!"

And then they were gone, gone in the night, and the sound of their wailing was a diminishing, scattering thinness in the distance. . . .

Old Robert Perry stared dazedly about,

at Eileen, huddled on the floor, sobbing with little, half-mad cries that wrung his heart—at Tony, staggering drunkenly to his feet, stumbling blindly toward his beloved.

"Eileen!"

The name reached out from Tony's heart like the caress of strong arms. Reeling, he followed that cry across the floor to her, dropped to the rock beside her, gathered her in his arms.

8

DAWN was near when at last old Robert Perry and young Anthony Kent trudged wearily through the purple night toward the plantation house.

The belated moon, preceding the sun by only a few hours, glimmered in the east, a golden, enchanted shield; the woods were still.

The two men did not speak. Their thoughts were full of the horror that had been, of the great pit they had dug in the night and filled with the bodies of the giant renegade and his followers.

Yet, as they drew closer and closer to the rambling old house that nestled, moon-bathed and serene, in the valley beneath them, words came at last.

"Anthony Kent," the old planter said earnestly, "I have lived on this land through near four generations. I have heard the Negroes talk—of things like this. But I would never have believed—unless the truth had been thrust in my face."

Tony Kent shifted his spade to his left shoulder before he replied.

"Perhaps it's better," he said slowly, "that men are inclined to skepticism. Perhaps, as time goes on, these evil, black arts will die out. It may all be part of some divine plan."

Their footsteps made little crunching sounds in the road.

"Thank God that that fiend and his niggers were strangers hereabouts!" the old man said fervently. "They won't be missed. Nobody, of course, would ever believe—what really happened."

"No," Tony said. "But it's all over, now. Those dead things have gone—back to their graves."

They were close to the house. On the long walk, before the low screened porch, a small white-clad figure waited. And then it was running swiftly, eagerly toward them.

"Eileen!"

The name was a pulsing song. And then she was locked in Tony's arms, and he was kissing her upturned, tremulous lips.

IF YOU WANT THE LADIES TO LIKE YOU

—HOME AGAIN SWEETS—AND HOW KISSABLE YOU LOOK!
—YOU, TOO, DEAR—IT WAS NICE OF YOU TO SHAVE AGAIN BEFORE COMING HOME—
—DON'T BE SILLY! I DIDN'T—I USED THAT SAMPLE OF LISTERINE SHAVING CREAM YOU SENT FOR—IT'S A WONDER!
—IT WOULD BE—LISTERINE PRODUCTS ARE SO WONDERFUL!
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"Most people run and scream if they see me."

Spanish Vampire

By E. HOFFMANN PRICE

The story of a lovely California vampire, who had lain in her lonely grave for more than a hundred years—the strange romance of a filling-station attendant

WAXING Prof Rodman's spare Packard meant eight bucks more for the boss, and no sleep for me that night. Not a chance to study *McKelvey on Evidence* for that a.m. class. But when I saw Judge Mottley roll up to the gas pump in his big black bus, I dropped my polishing-cloth and put on my best Green Gold smile.

That's the one the division sales man-

ager makes us wear when we sell a customer a quart of lube he doesn't need. Green Gold makes your motor smile. It plates the moving parts with oil.

"Good evening, Judge"—though Mottley wasn't a judge any more. He'd quit that job as soon as he learned enough about law to make a good thing of private practise. He was a precise fellow, with a squarish jaw and the sort of eye that puts no one at ease. He didn't stand for anything as vulgar as "Fill 'er up?" so I shot a quick look at the gage and said, "About twenty-two gallons, sir?"

He ate that up. What clicked with him was the time I said, "Twenty-three and a half," and hit it right on the head. That, plus my industry, energy, and perseverance in working my way through law school gave me an in with the judge. Which I needed plenty, as you will presently perceive.

"I do not need fuel. I do not need Green Gold," he answered. "Indeed, I do not need anything but a moment of your valuable time, Mr. Binns."

That meant me. I was too groggy to remove my smile or start polishing the windshield. I said, "Uh—um—uh."

The judge did not notice the interruption. "I am pausing," he said, after clearing his throat, "to tell you that you will not be employed by the firm of Mottley, Mottley, Bemis & Burton. Not even if you stand first in the final ratings.

He adjusted his glasses. "I refer to this matter of student riots. I saw you overturning the ticket-seller's booth in the Campus Theatre. I will not employ a lawbreaker. Good evening, Mr. Binns."

Before I could explain that the riot was not really a riot, and just a boycott of the Campus Theatre, whose management would not give students special rates, the judge was gunning that big engine and making a precise shift into second.

Why pick on me? The ticket girl wasn't in the booth when I pushed it over. Anyway, the crowd inside did all the damage. They pulled up something like forty seats, and jerked the fire exit curtains from their rods before the cops arrived. But Judge Mottley had to see me, out in front about the time I saw the law and checked out.

I shut off the gas pump and hung on for support. It is tough, being fired from a job one has not yet gotten. Then the boss came roaring out of the office.

"Judge," he yelled. "Oh, Judge——"

But Mottley was in high gear now, and not listening. Mr. Hill turned to me. "Eric, you jackass, if you insult another customer—by God, I'd fire you now if it wasn't for the prof's Packard—get busy and shine 'er up!"

I GOT busy, and he slammed the door. Judge Mottley had awakened him from a sound sleep and that always made him peevish. Maybe he would fire me, though if he did, he'd make a liar out of himself. I boarded at his house, and only because he'd signed a certificate stating I was a distant nephew.

The catch is, students can't live off the campus these days, except with relatives. Nobody seems to marvel at the number of chain store clerks, truck-drivers, and the like who have collegiate kinfolk. But that's the way it is.

The only ones who don't have devotees of learning in their families are the boys who own the gin mills in East Palo Verde. That is another funny thing. Liquor can't be sold in the limits of Palo Verde, so anyone with the price of a drink has to walk two miles to get one.

"Law, hell," I said to myself. Unless a fellow has good connections, he'll starve when he graduates. An LL.B can't be traded for a ham on rye anywhere in the state of California, which is an eleven hundred mile stretch of marvelous climate and nothing else.

I began getting up a heavy sweat, bending on that hood. When I got to the doors, I needed a rest. Also, there was *McKelvey* to study. My shift was from four till midnight. So I planted myself in the back seat of the prof's car, switched on the dome light—I might sell him a battery recharge, later—and opened the book.

Nuts for law. Maybe I ought to study medicine. Prof Rodman had the chair of biochemistry, or something of the sort. He was working on a crackpot theory of making synthetic blood, for use in transfusions. A great idea if it worked. He was kinked on blood. But he had two Packards. Maybe he wasn't so kinked.

I was too worried to concentrate, so I dug into the briefcase the prof had left in the back seat. More blood. All about building up red corpuscles for pernicious anemia—about fortifying the professional blood donors so they could put out a quart a day and not miss it. He had something there, if it worked.

Finally I realized I'd better shine that car, so I could deliver it for the prof to drive to work in the morning. I turned on the steam, and made a job of it. The boss had gone home, so I said, Be damned to keeping open till midnight. I closed the station and headed on foot across the campus. Mr. Hill lived a couple miles beyond, in the wooded foothills.

I didn't want to go home. I stopped at a narrow path that branches from the dirt road. It led past a thicket which surrounded a little cleared space; the angle of an old-fashioned snake fence. I'd often caught glimpses of it, and now I had an urge to plant myself on the top rail and play scarecrow. Meditation, you know; I had a lot to meditate about, with Judge Mottley going off his chump that way.

A big moon was rising. It made me say, I'll go to China and fly a crate, now that Spain's washed up. Not that I can fly, but a fellow can learn.

Chaparral slapped my ankles, and poison oak brushed my face. A lot of people can't stand that last, but like some, I'm immune.

THE fence was too rickety. Then I saw the flat stone. It was long and narrow and smooth, and oddly enough, the grass didn't grow up thickly about it. I parked myself and began reasoning thus: "I'll take a tramp steamer to Suva or Samar or Cebu. I'll be a planter. I'll plant my frame under a coconut tree and nuts for school."

I was plently surprised when a girl said, "Are you going to sit there all night and not even speak to me?"

Her English had a Spanish accent. So did her face and hair. I don't know what surprised me the most, seeing how lovely she was, or just seeing her. Not being an expert on ladies' wear, I didn't make many details of her dress, except that it reached from her chin to her ankles. Just a bit like an old-fashioned shroud, but you never can tell what these co-eds'll wear next.

"Uh—say—I didn't hear you come in."

"Hardly anyone hears me," she said. "You were sitting on my front door as if you belonged there. But it's nice, meeting you."

She had the kind of eyes you read about. Her hair was stacked way up, and a lace scarf, all white, reached down and about her shoulders.

"That's mutual," I admitted. "But this front door. I don't get it."

She pointed toward the slab where I had been sitting. The stone was about two and a half feet wide and six feet long. A second look at it made me feel funny all over. I hadn't noticed the words chiseled at one end.

"*Aqui yace Doña Catalina . . .*" I'd been sitting on a grave that dated back to the Spanish Occupation. The inscription said, "Here lies Doña Catalina."

"Wait a second," I said, making a quick

recovery. "Quit ribbing me. If you're a sleepwalker, I'll show you the way home."

She thought I was gosh-awful stupid. "I'm a sleepwalker. I live here, and you were sitting on my front door. Me, I am Catalina Maria Perez y Villamediana." She added, somewhat sadly, "I am a vampire."

"Oh, yeah?" With this apt retort, I caught her hand. It was somewhat chilly, as what girl's wouldn't be, running around that way. "Let's talk this over."

"You're awfully sweet. Most people run and scream when they see me. Back in 1827, a poor fellow just ran and ran until he dropped dead. Heavens, can I help if I'm a vampire?"

"Listen, honey," I told her, "don't call yourself a vampire. I know you're gorgeous, and that's a nice gown, but there are better words."

"It's a shroud," she cut in, sighing. "I do wish I had some nice clothes."

That last was reassuring. Absolutely normal after all. Pretty much like Mr. Hill's wife, only better looking. I skipped that quip, and went on, "Baby, they quit calling them vampires about the time you were born. It's bum stuff, being so out of date."

"But"—she made a gesture, Spanish as her comb and hair—"I *am* one. I come out of my grave. Usually at midnight. And—oh, I'm afraid to tell you. You'll hate me."

"Yeah, I know. You roam around drinking people's blood, and you have to be home before sunrise, and you can't cross running water."

"Oh." She smiled and wrapped both arms around me. "My dear, you do understand!"

When a dame like Catalina plants a blistering kiss smack on my mouth, without even wondering whether I have a car and/or a bottle, it is cause for triumph. Of course, she was a bit dotty on this business of living in a grave, and that makes a law student introspective. On the other hand, she was born in 1793, which certainly was an ample margin.

Finally Catalina broke away and patted her hair. "I'm awfully sorry, but I simply must eat."

They all get to that, sooner or later. I had three dimes and a couple of pennies in my jeans. "How about a hamburger, at the Greek's?"

She shook her head. "I tol' you. *querido*, I must drink blood."

"Oh, all right." I took her hand and helped her from the tombstone. "Let's both have a droppie. I'll string along with you."

Clouds had begun to gather, and the moon darkened. I could just see a graceful ripple of white as I followed her to the road. Then she took a shortcut, and it kept me breathless, going over fields and through groves. Catalina had a trick of handling barbed wire. I didn't, so my shoulder and the seat of my pants were a lot the worse for that jaunt.

A dog bayed. His chain rattled. "Butch," I thought, "if anyone sees me with this doll, I'll be moving in with you." But Catalina was heading for the bungalow across the road. I fell back a bit. If this was where she lived, and her old man heard her go in, and saw me, there'd be some embarrassment. Palo Verde is a narrow-minded town.

She made another Houdini at the back door. Slick! Got in without a click or squeak. In a minute, a curtain moved. Catalina leaned out over the sill. I expected her to beckon, and I was ready to back down. Tombstones were one thing, and boudoirs were something else.

But she didn't ask me in. Quite the contrary. Her gesture meant, "Stand fast, buddy. I'll be back soon."

Going to get dressed, huh? Oh, all right.

Someone inside was tossing, restlessly. I heard a kid make a funny little sound like

it was going to wake up and cry, and then it decided not to. Someone was humming, though the lights weren't on. A drowsy, sleepy sound. It made my eyelids droop, and my fingers began to relax from the fence.

SOMETHING startled me. It was Catalina. She'd come out of the house, and slipped right up on me. She caught my hand as if I belonged to her, and we set out across the fields and through the thickets. She hadn't put on another dress.

Catalina was whispering things in Spanish. English didn't quite express her thoughts. She was tickled to meet someone who didn't run and scream. Her hands were warm now, and so were her lips.

Once we were back on the tombstone, she told me the story of her life. That proved she was wired up one hundred percent feminine. It seems she grieved herself to death about a fiancé some Gringo ruffian had shot to pieces.

She laughed right out when I asked her about the chances of seeing her turn into a wolf. "Oh, you are so funny! A vampire, she is a vampire. A werewolf, that is something different."

None the less, I was doing some tall pondering. She seemed more substantial, since that queer, short trip to the cottage. And there had been a lot of pernicious and common anemia around Palo Verde. The butcher shops were sold out of calf liver by nine every morning, and at sixty cents a pound, the working classes couldn't afford it. I began to get new angles on Prof Rodman's frenzy about synthetic blood for transfusions.

This put me on the spot. Vampires are settled by having a wooden stake driven through their hearts while they're lying in their graves. A prospective jurist has to be public-spirited, like the judge who sentenced his own son to hang. Professional ideals, I mean.

But Catalina was alive, in a way, and even if I were licensed to practise law, it would take a lot of constitutional amendments before I could be judge, jury, and executioner. Anyway, I liked her a lot. Maybe I could get her to change her ways.

"Honey," I said finally, "you're a damn devastating menace, picking on kids. Whyn't you tackle grown-ups?"

Tears were in her eyes when she looked at me. "Ees too many of the college people. They drink gin, they smoke feelthy cigarettes. My stomach"—she patted herself in the appropriate spot—"she is weak."

Me, I hadn't smoked for so long I'd forgotten the taste. I was economizing, having to pay that fine for rioting at the theatre. Catalina's grief touched me. She needed young blood, and the way people live in this year of grace was unpalatable.

Then I got the answer. I said, "Baby, I'll save you and the kids of Palo Verde." With a dramatic gesture, I bared my throat. "Drink deep!"

She slowly drew back. "But no. I love you, do you understand? It will kill you, and you are nice. You do not run and scream. Have you ever lived one hundred and twenty-nine years without *any* friends?"

"It's been bad enough the past four years, going to school and being broke," I told her, which was the truth. "But listen. Prof Rodman is inventing a tonic that builds blood. I'll take a bottle of it. That way, it'll be fine for everyone concerned."

This intrigued her, though explaining it was tough. In the first place, I didn't understand the details, and in the second place, women are awfully dumb about scientific things. She ended by saying it was perfectly clear.

"If you are sure," she said, eager yet hesitant.

Catalina's teeth were whiter than a toothpaste model's. For a second, I felt

squeamish, and she seemed to read my thought. "Will not hurt," she whispered. "I don't really make the bite. I just drink, with the lips and tongue."

"Uh—sort of a supercharged kiss?"

"You understand everything!"

So I finished unlimbering my egg-stained necktie. Catalina made contented little sounds that became a sleepy humming. In a moment or so, I wasn't dizzy or nauseated. Her hair was the softest that ever touched anyone's cheek or throat . . . hell, a pint blood transfusion didn't seem to hurt the professional donors. . . .

"I mus' not be piggish," she finally said.

Somehow, Catalina seemed to be getting more substantial. If she hadn't been such a perfect lady, I'd have slapped her hip just to check up on the sound. I was groggy, all right, but altogether, it was nicer than I'd ever figured it could be, sitting on a tombstone with an armful of vampire.

When the air had the taste of dawn, she stirred and said, "Is time to go home. The sun will soon rise, no?" She made a sudden gesture. "Look. Over there!"

I turned. There was nothing to see. When I faced back toward Catalina, she was gone. A spiral of whitish fog seemed to be sinking into the stone. That did make me feel funny.

She actually lived under the slab. The real article. It'd be nice if Prof. Rodman's blood-builder didn't work. Which gave me some long thoughts as I trudged wearily homeward.

THE sun rose before I got there. The boss had backed his heap out of the garage and was playing a saxophone solo with the accelerator to give her a fast warm-up. He uses Green Gold lube, so he figures you can't ruin an engine, no matter how cold it is when you gun it.

He saw me trying to sneak in, and he poked his head out and yelled, "No damn wonder I been catching you asleep in the battery room! If you don't get Judge Mottley's business back, I'll fire you."

Mr. Hill was not playing. The judge's account gave the station prestige. I had more than Spanish vampires to contend with.

Mrs. Hill was blinking and smoking her morning cigarette when I stepped into the kitchen. I used to think she was nice-looking, but now blonds seemed a bit stuffy. She said, "You're up awful early, Eric."

"Yeah, and I feel faint, too," I said, and dug into the oatmeal.

She looked at me rather funny, but said no more. Getting up in the middle of the night to get Hill's breakfast was tough, I gathered.

So was that day at school. Most of the time I didn't know whether they were talking about *torts* or tarts. What with sleep-walking around the campus, I was eyeing more co-eds than I ever had before. I was looking for the honey who had ribbed me last night.

Somehow, I lived through the day. Four bowls of chili under my belt bucked me up enough for the night at the filling-station. It was on El Camino Real, the old Royal Post Road that reaches from San Francisco to San Diego. The good *padres* used to march from one mission to the next, on foot. It was a laugh, picturing what they'd have thought of Catalina.

That idea led me to a detour. There was enough time, so I went to that slab in the thicket. By daylight it looked bleak and lonesome, but this was no time for sentiment. I lifted a picket from the snake fence and pried at the slab. It was easy to work it away.

There was no digging to do. The burial crypt was of squared stones. In the bottom was a home-made casket, with handles of tarnished silver. Like the plate on the lid, they'd been hammered out by a smith.

I dropped down into the hole. There was room enough for my feet, without standing on the coffin. I lifted the top and pretty nearly let it slam down. Catalina had not been feeding me moon-dust.

She was lying there, eyes shut. Her hands were crossed on her breast. Talk about complexion. Transparent olive, with a rosy flush.

"Snap out of it! I found you."

She didn't answer. There was a sleepy little smile that kept her lips from closing too tight. No mortician ever made a girl up that cleverly. Her nails were pink and long. There was not a trace of a scratch on her little feet, nor any dust. That was what made me lower the lid in a hurry. I climbed out and spent some minutes working the slab back into place. Talking to a girl about how cozy it must be in her coffin is one thing, and seeing her in it is another.

I didn't feel quite natural until I reported for duty. Mr. Hill eyed me as though something was missing. I said, "Watch me sell Judge Mottley a refill of Green Gold."

"You'd better, you chump," he grumbled. "I'm giving you another chance, maybe. I can't fire you today account me and the missus is going to a movie."

WHEN I closed the station and locked up the water and air hoses, so the public can't steal them, I made the next move to reform Catalina's diet. After taking on another bowl of chili, I had Mike put some in a carton to take along.

Catalina was sitting on the grave, waiting for me. "Everyone but you is frighten," she said, adoringly. "Now we will eat, no?"

She kissed me and made a job of it. I said, "Well, if you just got to, you got to, I guess. But it seems to me you could gradually get off that blood diet. I was down to Mike's and here's some chili for you."

"Oh!" She wiggled free and gave me a reproachful eye. "You have eat the chili? With garlic?"

"What's the matter?" It got me down, the way she looked at me. "I always figured you early Californians were nuts about it. Anyway, I took some of those drunkard's delights. They kill your breath. The boss keeps them at the station, so the missus won't know he's tossed off too many noggins."

"But you don't understand. The vampire, she cannot smell the garlic, but it is poison. That is the danger. So I must call on selected people. Now you are——" She shrugged. I wasn't fit to eat. "I mus' go back, over there."

She gestured in the direction of the place we'd been the other night.

I felt like a heel. But I tried to square myself. "Then suppose you go on the prowl again tonight, while I work on some plans. You need some nice clothes, and then people won't say *eek* or *awk* and pass out when they see you."

That worked, as I knew it would. Not to be outdone, Catalina said she'd skip her dinner that night. She'd go on a hunger strike, and all for me.

We finally compromised on a raid on Prof Rodman's laboratory. Catalina had a way with locks, as I previously remarked. When we came back, she wanted me to sit around while she gossiped about the Ortegas, who were her neighbors in 1809, but I had to get some sleep and do some thinking. So she solemnly promised to lay off blood-drinking.

It was several days before I got rid of the garlic taint, and Catalina was decidedly peaked-looking. In the meanwhile, I'd drunk most of Prof Rodman's mixture. Likewise, I'd doped out a way to get Judge Mottley back in line.

The Palo Verde papers ballyhooed the startling recovery of several pernicious anemia victims. Under the prof's daring

treatment—handled by a local physician—a cure was being effected. This was hot news, but it meant that my missionary work and not the tonic was doing the job.

It looked as if one Eric Binns was nicely on the spot. The only out seemed to be eating two-three pounds of liver a day, and keeping Catalina on a reducing diet. That, or sharpen up a wooden stake.

I sneaked out one afternoon to do just that, but she looked too pretty, lying there in her coffin. Vampire or no, it was next door to murder. Anyway, I wasn't developing anemia myself, not yet.

So for the next move, I snitched Mrs. Hill's evening gown—the one she took on approval, and wore, and got a cigarette burn on it, so she couldn't return it the day after the party. It was a shade of red that looked like hell on her, but with Catalina's early Spanish architecture and coloring, she'd roll 'em in the aisles.

I was planning a complex trick that only a legal mind could follow. There was one of those dances to replenish Palo Verde's fund for the underprivileged. With all the refined people and members of civic organizations attending *en masse,* you'd call it a ball, I guess.

Judge Mottley would be there. Mrs. Mottley also. Likewise, Catalina and I would be among those present. The Hills would not attend. She had nothing to wear, and he couldn't afford the ten bucks admission. Neither could I, but look what Hannibal did about the Alps.

CATALINA was thrilled silly when she saw the red dress and silver shoes. Her hair never got mussed up, and she never needed make-up, which is one of the handy things about being a vampire. I was getting awfully fond of her. A swell dame, and good-hearted. Tolerant of my plans for her future, just in case Prof Rodman's blood-builder didn't work out right.

"Baby," I expounded, "the human organization is the most versatile thing on earth. Particularly when it comes to diet." We were sitting on the tombstone when I went into my pep talk, as it wasn't quite late enough for Catalina to get dressed for the ball. "Now, I'm standing these blood transfusions well enough. And here's how you can gradually switch——"

It was simple. Look at the Hindoos, they eat practically nothing but starch, and so do millions of Chinese. Then there's the Eskimos: hundred percent blubber diet. Why couldn't Catalina shift, bit by bit, to beef blood, or chicken, or something? And finally to bullion cubes.

Even if Prof Rodman's tonic did work, I'd feel a little less like a human *hor d'oeuvre.* Another thing, he'd missed his bottle, and the police were investigating. No telling when we could snitch some more.

Catalina was reasonable about it all, and open-minded. So I was thrilled and lighthearted when we started out for the ball. At times I had to carry her to save her shoes. She whispered, "When you are a famous lawyer, *querido,* we will move the coffin to our house, no?"

You see, as I got used to her, I realized she'd never really been dead. Being in a coffin doesn't mean you're a corpse. Maybe Prof Rodman, with all his biochemistry stuff, could have explained things. Only, there'd be too much publicity, and so I didn't dare take it up with him.

We hailed a taxi at the S. P. Station. I'd told Mr. Hill I wanted the evening off, by way of getting in good with Judge Mottley, showing him I was public-spirited.

THE Civic Center is a low and rambling building with a red-tiled roof and arcades along the patio. Being California Spanish, it was strange and thrilling to Catalina. There was a fountain in the court, and festoons of colored globes made artificial moonlight.

She didn't know the latest steps, but no one cared, not even the handful of collegians who had showed up, for some unheard-of reason.

Judge Mottley was particularly thrilled when he saw her. He forgot all about his wife and the other battle-axes and tapped me on the shoulder, just about the time I cut in on a tall and handsome and started edging Catalina into the patio. The women were making dirty quips about her dress, and not even a vampire can take that.

I wasn't surprised about the judge. He'd been eyeing us all evening.

"Ah . . . Mr. Binns. I am pleasantly surprised to see you here."

"Civic spirit, sir," I said, and presented him to Catalina.

When she got through turning the magnificent eyes on him, he hailed a flunkey who was distributing glasses of punch. Then he changed his mind and asked us to drive to the country club for a spot of Scotch.

Catalina said she never drank and didn't smoke, but the drive would be lovely. He was too cagey to try to edge me out. That would come later; he was a foxy old buzzard. In the meanwhile, he was much impressed by a fellow who had a girl who didn't gargle furniture polish. I began to seem the sort of person who fitted into the firm of Mottley, Mottley, Bemis & Burton. It was really a nice evening, in spite of finally having to get back to the ball.

While the judge was telling me how well he liked Green Gold, the tall and handsome snagged Catalina. By the time I got rid of the judge, I couldn't find my date.

Not for a while, that is. I was worried. Suppose she had reverted to type and was taking a light lunch? Suppose her victim yeeped or started talking later? I was in a sweat, dashing around looking for her.

I got good and sore when I missed the tall and handsome. When a fellow is neither, he is inclined to be sensitive about such things. So when I found them in a parked car, I was relieved and hog wild at the same time—relieved because she wasn't doing any blood-drinking, and griped because the big lug was kissing her breathless, and she liked it. Liked it, and wearing the red dress I furnished. One hundred and twenty-nine years in a shroud, and double-crossing me, who'd got her into the social whirl.

He got out of the car when I cracked off. I just measured him and flattened him. This was no time for politeness, and if I'd given him a chance, where'd my chance have been?

He flopped to the running-board. That was what finished knocking him cold, I guess. There was a general departure from the other parked cars, but a crowd of newcomers who hadn't been committing themselves came out of the patio to watch the show.

I turned around to give Catalina hell. She straightened up and showed her claws. "Go away! My poor Johnnie——" She knelt beside the big lug and began crying. I had to check out before the judge heard I was a law-breaker again. Assault and battery at the Civic Center was as bad as having leprosy.

The minute she saw a good-looking fellow, she made a sap of me. That burned me up. That I had Judge Mottley on the right side again fell flat. With the evening totally sour, I hoofed it to East Palo Verde and began lapping up firewater.

AFTER about eight noggins of fifteen-cent Bourbon, I began to see the joke of it all. Catalina was now so used to me not screaming and running, she'd be tactless with Johnnie. Funny, huh?

Positively excruciating. It never occurred to me to think of what'd happen if she did scare him silly. I guess I must have been drunk when I went into the next place.

Anyway, I was when I toddled out of there, singing, "I love a lassie . . ."

Also, being hungry, I went to Mike's and scoffed up all the chili he had in the pot. He was making a fresh batch, so he gave me a cut rate on the bottom stratum. What's more, he dug out a bottle of mastika and gave me a big shot. That's Greek brandy with a flavor like varnish, only spicy.

When Mike looked at the bottle, he handed it back and said, "Take him along. Need eye-opener, huh?"

Maybe I would, so I took it and wove my way home. That was the only thing I hadn't forgotten. But habit, I learned later, is stronger than mastika.

When I woke up, I was frozen stiff and lying on the tombstone, where I had passed out. Catalina was bending over me. My throat felt funny. She was smiling and licking her lips. The moon made her shoulders white and beautiful, and there were tears in her eyes.

"I was just teasing you," she whispered. "When you went away, everything she is spoil. I am lonesome, but I pretend I like it. Only, I cannot stand the ball any more, so I come home. You forgive me?"

"Uh—um." I was groggy, and trying to think of something, but I forgot what it was. Supposing Mrs. Hill's silver slippers had been ruined? "Sure. What time is it?"

She shrugged. Time didn't matter. She knew now who was boss, and she liked it. Socking that big lug had been a good move after all.

"I was so hungry," she went on. "This dancing."

"Say no more about it, honey. Gee, my damn head!"

Catalina frowned. She sat up real straight, and tried to smile.

"I have the headache, too."

She looked sick. I rubbed my throat. I should have known the answer then, but I didn't. Not until she made gagging sounds and doubled up. Then she wrapped both arms about me and said she was going to die.

There was nothing to be done. Whoever heard of an antidote for chili and Bourbon? But I was on my feet, with wild notions about dashing to a drug store. When she screamed, I turned back to get her. It'd save time, taking her along.

I was all rattled, but that was nothing to what I was when I saw Catalina huddled face down on the slab. The red dress was collapsing as I stared. A queer sort of mist swirled up like cigarette smoke. *Up* this time.

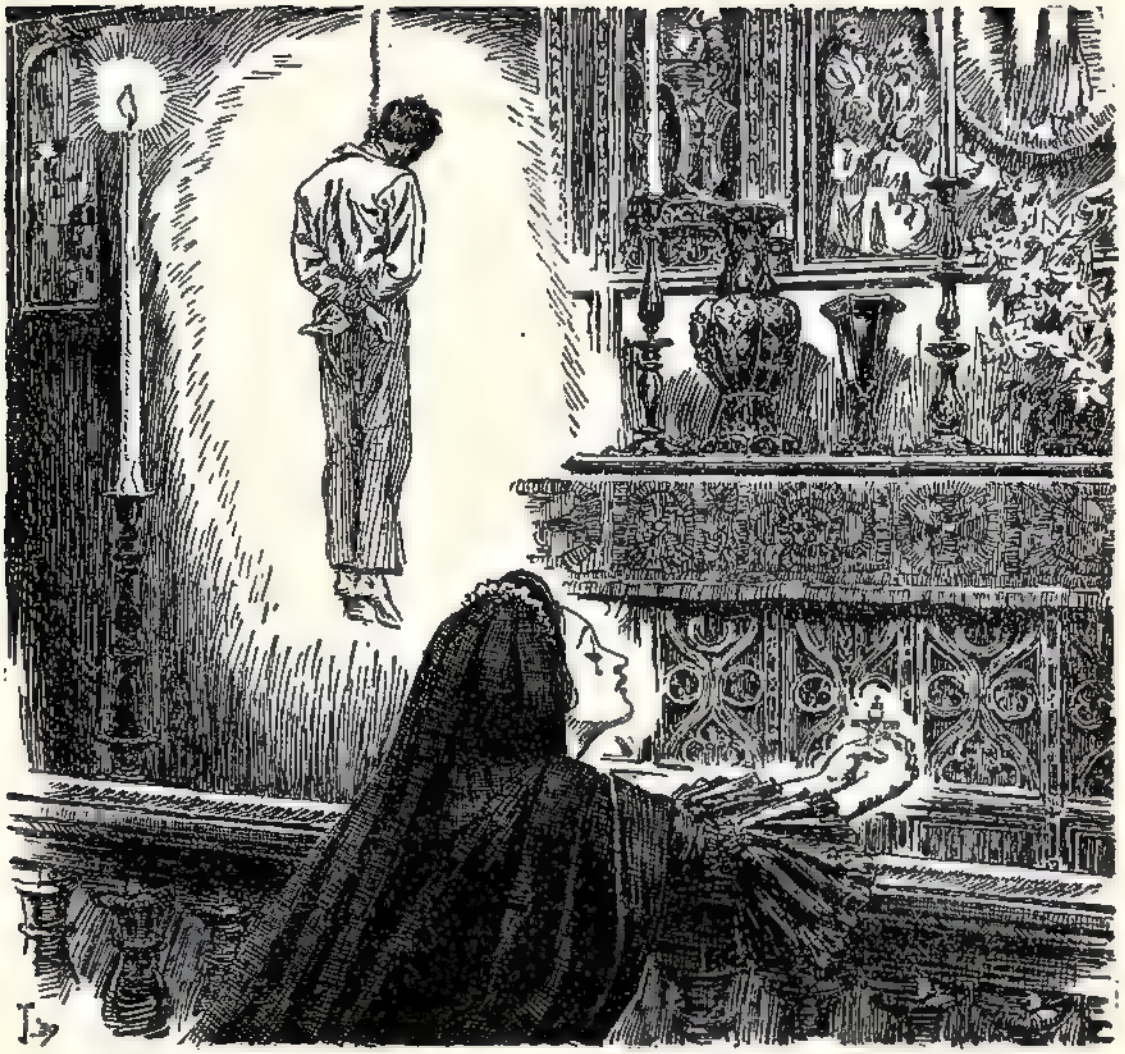
Her cry was not out of my ears before the dress and shoes were empty. I grabbed them and ran. There was no work and no school for me the next day. What kept me busy was thinking of what'd happen when someone wondered about my girl friend; when someone trailed my footprints to the grave, and began to figure it was a nice place to hide a corpse.

Mrs. Hill had a hunch someone had worn her dress and shoes, and she looked at me a lot, the next couple days. Half the wives in town were gabbling about the girl in red. One thing about that, Judge Mottley wouldn't be asking me about her!

Finally I went to the grave and opened it.

The coffin wasn't empty, but anyone could see that what was in it had been there for years and years. Now that that was settled, I sat down and bawled like a kid. Even when I learned that the epidemic of pernicious anemia was over, and Prof Rodman was the big scientist of the day, I felt rotten.

Anyway, I got the job with Judge Mottley. I'm a member of the firm. And in odd moments, I sit on that slab, closing my eyes and trying to bring Catalina's face back in memory. Just what did happen to her is one for Prof Rodman to figure out.



"She spent the night upon her knees before the altar of the little village church."

The Door Without a Key

By SEABURY QUINN

The Chinese magic of Yai Ching ushers us into a romantic weird tale of the American Civil War—a tender and moving story

ATLANTIC CITY, N. J., Sept. 29 (N. P.)—Police here are seeking George K. Ormandie, whose bride of a few hours was found dead today in their suite at the Graynow Hotel, for questioning. Ormandie had married Miss Griselda Pancoast of Neponsit, N. Y., at St. Anselm's Church, Quogue, N. Y., yesterday morning, and the couple came directly to Atlantic City on their honeymoon.

At noon today, when neither of them appeared and housemaids had been unable to get response to repeated knockings, J. M Davies, assistant manager, opened the door to the suite with a pass key, and the body of Mrs. Ormandie, dressed in her traveling-costume, and with only hat and gloves removed, was found lying before the sofa in the sitting-room. On the couch, beside her hat and gloves, was a new handbag containing a purse in which was $500 in bills of various denominations. The couple's luggage had not been unpacked, and Mr. Ormandie was nowhere to be found. Dr. Wm. S. Bite of Good Samaritan Hospital, who responded to the hotel's call for an ambulance, pronounced the woman dead and declared she had been so for approximately 24 hours, which would place the time of her demise a few minutes after she and her husband had registered downstairs. An autopsy to determine the cause of death will be performed later.

Walter Munro, clerk, who was on duty at the desk when the Ormandies registered at the Graynow, asserted the couple seemed to be middle-aged and were obviously just married. "We see so many newlyweds here we learn to recognize them at a glance," he declared. Their luggage consisted of five bags, two a gentleman's and three a lady's, and was apparently brand new. Both were fashionably and expensively dressed.

No employee of the hotel remembers seeing either of them after O. S. Weaver and Ed Simmons, bellboys, escorted them to the suite which Ormandie had engaged by wire a week before.

While foul play is not suspected in connection with the tragedy, the authorities are anxious to find the missing groom for questioning.

George K. Ormandie was understood by relatives of the dead woman to have been a wealthy tobacco grower of St. Mary's City, Md., but official inquiries addressed to that place reveal that no such person is known in St. Mary's City or vicinity.

—New York Evening Sentinel.

GRISELDA PANCOAST paused wearily in midstep to catch her breath. They were in the midst of a house party, and house parties meant extra work. Not that she minded them, their gayety helped her forget herself, but—they did mean extra work, and she was tired; tired with the exhaustion only a soul-starved sixty-year-old spinster can experience whose youth is a vague, misty memory and to whom old age is more than a mere threat. And yet she welcomed work, arm-cramping and back-stiffening though it was, for only through it could she have a contact with her cousins' guests.

Griselda did not dance. She hadn't waltzed or two-stepped since *Break the News to Mother* and *Good-bye, Dolly Gray* were reigning favorites. The younger members of the family and their friends fox-trotted and tangoed to the blaring of the radio and gramophone from breakfast to bed-time. Griselda was a stranger to the rules of bridge, both auction and contract, and the older members of the company played for a cent a point with the avidity of Mississippi River gamblers from dinner-time till midnight.

Griselda would have loved to learn to play. More than once in fancy she had seen herself at the bridge table, cards fanned out before her, jewels flashing on her cream-white, rose-tipped fingers as she murmured languidly, "Eight spades," or "I double," or, as the evening closed, "That makes just fifty-seven dollars that you owe me, dear."

But there was none to teach Griselda how to play, or, if she had been taught, none to play with her. Aside from the fact that her time was taken up with carrying and fetching, darning, mending and attending on her cousins, she could not

afford a cent a point, or half a cent, or anything. Poor relations have no money to indulge in venial or mortal vices, and Griselda was a poor relation, fed and clothed with scraps and oddments from her cousins' table and wardrobes, granted boon of bed and shelter, but paid no wages and allowed no stipend. Except when some guest new to Lake Acres mistook her for a member of the hired staff and handed her a tip for catching up the rent in a torn gown or lending deft assistance at the toilette, she never had as much as ten cents she could call her own.

Like Mohammed's coffin, she was placed midway between the earth and ether. She was "Miss Griselda" to the maids and cook and chauffeur, even to the butler; accordingly she could not eat below-stairs or have social intercourse with the servants. In the reconditioned cast-offs of her relatives she was not presentable, save at the simplest family dinners. As a consequence she ate her meals alone in the bleak room fitted with discarded furniture or, more often, consumed a "snack" in the pantry where, in the isthmian passage between the dining-room and kitchen, she could absorb spiced crumbs of gossip from both poles of society as she munched her sandwich and sipped her glass of milk or cup of tea.

Now, with a tray of empty cocktail glasses in her hand, she paused beside the sun-porch steps to rest a moment. The party was in full swing. Chinese lanterns bobbed and curtsied in the gently rising breeze; from a marquee set out on the lawn the hot, erotic rhythm of a rumba beat upon the sultry air with the repercussive vibrance of a rada drum. White dinner-coated young men guided partners clad in sheerest crêpe or airy marquisette across the polished floor of the pavilion. Each side the green-tiled terrace where she stood, huge urns of molded stone were overflowing with bright blossoms; in a series of long sweeps and terraces the shaven lawn sloped downward to the narrow border of white sand washed by the rippling waves of Lake Ronkonkoma where power boats lay circling lazily at anchor like a flock of idling swans. Beyond, there showed the glory of the woods, flaunting their draperies to each sighing breath of breeze, and in the distance were the low Long Island hills, mere mounds of shadow shouldering against the dulling luster of the violet evening mist. From the formal garden set behind the loggia clustering roses drenched the air with unutterable sweetness.

How like, yet how unlike Barleywood it was, she thought—Barleywood, near Carthagena Creek where the broad bottom lands pushed the low, house-dotted hills back from the river's edge and her father's great-grandfather had held court baron and court leet, as was his right prescriptive as the lord of St. Michael's Manor. The power and the glory had departed long since, the golden past reflected faintly, like the faded effigies in old daguerreotypes, but the old house—in alien hands, now—still stood on the hilltop overlooking the Potomac; some vestiges of old mahogany were in the halls; a few old family portraits still hung on the walls. Among them was the picture of Great-Aunt Griselda, her namesake and a great belle in her day, whose unhappy love affair with the Yankee . . . Her revery was broken by a hail, not loud, but soft and musically modulated, yet imperative as the trumpet call of the Last Day: "Cousin Griselda, come here!"

COUSIN Clementine Spottswood held court on the east sun porch. It was a cool and pleasant place, a sanctuary from the young folks' rather rowdy gayety. Old-fashioned chintz patterned with bouquets of roses hung beside the well-screened casements; deep chairs and sofas of gray

willow covered with cool cretonne extended restful invitation; on the mirror-topped low table was a bowl of crushed ice flanked by a carafe of sweetened lime juice, tall, square bottles of dry gin and some siphons of seltzer.

Cousin Clementine looked what she was, a woman in her fifties trying with considerable success to appear in her late thirties. Her face was lightly lined about the eyes, but the artifices of beauticians had uprooted most of nature's milestones. Her blue-black hair was waved to delicate perfection, her lips were bright as a geranium—an attractive woman in a worldly way, scrupulous in each small detail of her appearance. When she spoke her voice was charming, but she was not at all a cozy sort of person. Her eyes were too hard, stocktaking and appraising.

For once she and her little coterie of intimates were not absorbed in bridge. Professor Huling, lately back from China and Tibet, was holding forth on Oriental magic, and eight pairs of carefully mascaraed eyes were on him with the fascination women never fail to register when occultism is discussed. Between his long, white, "psychic" fingers Professor Huling drew a sheaf of six slim bamboo wands, each painted black and marked on one side with a latitudinal band of white. "These," he pronounced in his best classroom manner, "are the talismanic wands of the Yai Ching, or mystical Five Changes of Wen Wang, said by scholars to be the most ancient magical device and formula extant. Their use is very simple—see." He shuffled the light splints between his hands as if they were pung chow counters, and dropped them fanwise on the umber tiles of the porch floor. They fell in something like a military formation, a rank of three at almost even distances apart, two more like file-closers at their rear, and, athwart the two rows one lone stick, six inches front and center, like the leader of the detail. Oddly, two of the little wands dropped on their rounded unmarked sides, four on their flat, lined surfaces.

"And now, observe," Professor Huling continued. "One lays the six wands parallel and brings them close together. Then he sees, formed by the markings on their flat sides interspersed with blanks, one of the sixty-four possible Chinese geometric hexagrams." Drawing the flattened wands together he pointed to the figure they described. "That is the third of the Five Changes," he announced delightedly. "A very fortunate sign. The door it marks should open on a garden filled with joys for its beholder."

"And how, precisely, is it used, Professor?" Cousin Clementine asked. "Is it a form of fortune telling?"

Doctor Huling smiled a patient smile. These women! "Not precisely, Mrs. Spottswood. The Chinese think it magic, and have thought so since the Twelfth Century, B. C. When the symbol has been formed by chance—or by the favor of the gods, as several million people believe—one gazes at it fixedly till its image has been firmly printed on the mind's eye. Then the votary sits or kneels with closed eyes—a blindfold makes it more effective—and imagines himself looking at a door on which the symbol is engraved. To get the best results one makes his mind a perfect blank, excluding every other thought from it, and concentrating only on the door which has no lock or key or latch, and opens only of its own accord."

"Opens, Doctor Huling?"

"Precisely, Mrs. Spottswood." There was just the proper blend of arrogance and deference in his tone. His hearers loved it. " 'Opens' is correct. If one concentrates sufficiently, and stares at the door long enough with his mind's eye, the door, Wen Wang assures us, will swing inward by itself."

"Indeed? And then what happens?"

There was just the proper blend of incredulity and deference in her voice. The other seven ladies weren't quite sure they liked it. After all, Professor Huling was a very learned man and had spent years in the Far East. If he declared a thing were so . . .

"One just sits still and throws his mental gaze against the door marked with the mystic hexagram. If and when it opens—and it doesn't always do so—one continues kneeling as before, but in imagination one gets up and walks straight through the door. Then"—he paused impressively—"one sees what one may see."

"And what is that, Professor Huling? Something pleasant?"

Doctor Huling raised his shoulders in the slightest intimation of a well-bred shrug. "Not always, Mrs. Spottswood. I remember once in Singapore when we witnessed something quite the opposite."

"Oh, Doctor Huling, do tell us!" Mrs. Smythe-Felton besought. "Was it tragic?"

"Quite," Professor Huling answered dryly. "Three of us were trying it, and one of the party was a young man who had made arrangements to go tiger hunting in Sumatra the next day. Like so many white men in the East he had nothing but contempt for Oriental lore, and when it was proposed we make a few experiments with Yai Ching he scoffed at the idea. Curiously," he smiled grimly, "he was the first and only one to try it that night."

"Oh, and what happened, Professor?" Mrs. Smythe-Felton queried as the others seconded her question with approving nods and bird-like twitters.

"Young Ormsby tossed the wands and laid them side by side to form a hexagram. It was the Fourth Sign, which is usually not a fortunate one for the experimenter. He stared at the symbol until he'd fixed it firmly in his mind, then knelt down on a straw mat and tied a handkerchief around his eyes. Several minutes passed and nothing happened, and finally he said petulantly, 'I'm tired of all this damned nonsense; pour me a drink, somebody,' and was just about to rip the blindfold off and rise when he dropped back to the mat with something like a gasp. 'The door's there!' he exclaimed. 'I can see it. Lacquered red, with the sign laid on it in gold leaf. It's opening—I'm going through!' For a few minutes everything was silent; then:

" 'I'm in a jungle,' he called to us, speaking as if he were a long way off. 'It's a Sumatran jungle; I can hear the screeching of the parakeets, and—I'm where I'll be a week from now! Will I bag a tiger? I demand to see the future; I demand to know what's going to happen to me one week from this minute!'

"We watched him for perhaps five minutes; then my other friend called softly, 'What's happening?'

" 'Nothing,' Ormsby replied. 'Everything's gone black as pitch. I can't see a thing; it's darker than a tomb.'

" 'Better chop the time-span down a little, then, son,' the other man advised. 'Maybe the Yai Ching can't look that far into the future.'

"Ormsby nodded. 'I demand to see myself five days from now,' he called, as if he gave an order to a servant. Then, as nothing seemed to happen, 'Four days—three—two days—tomorrow—six hours—oh, God, not that; not that!' he screamed. 'They're putting me into a coffin—they're fastening down the lid——'

"He jerked the blindfold off his face and glared at us with eyes gone dead and glassy as those of a stale fish. Next moment he fell sidewise to the floor, dead from a heart attack."

"HOW dreadful!" Cousin Clementine controlled a shudder. Professor Huling had ability to dramatize his anecdotes, and had spared no histrionics in relating the tragedy. "Does the—the Yai

Ching only show the future?" she added as the silence fell and lengthened.

"Oh, no. Sometimes the seer sees the past; sometimes he has a flight of pure fantasy. It all depends."

"On what does it depend, Professor?" ventured Mrs. Smythe-Felton.

"Oh"—Doctor Huling spread his hands and raised his brows in a serio-comic grimace—"that's hard to say. The seer's experience and background, possibly. Our psychologists will tell you that it's nothing more in principle than the old crystal gazing-sphere, something on which we can concentrate our senses—dull our conscious minds and release our subconscious. Four hundred million Chinese, many of them graduates of our best universities, think that it's real magic, a manifestation of the will of the immortal gods."

"What do you say it is, Professor?"

"I wouldn't know." His face was mask-like. "Wouldn't one of you like to—er——see what lies behind the door without a key?"

"Mercy, no!" Thus Mrs. Smythe-Felton. "I shouldn't care to look down in my own casket—don't some of you girls want to try?" She swept the circle with defiantly bright eyes.

No one took the challenge up, and Professor Huling stroked his small mustache. "Perhaps you've made a wise decision, after all, ladies," he murmured.

"It's rather dangerous to pry into the future, or the past, for that matter. Besides"—he cast a mildly caustic glance at them—"I scarcely think you're ideal subjects for experiment."

"You mean we lack imagination, or the power to concentrate?" Cousin Clementine's voice was faintly touched with frost.

"Oh, no; by no means, quite the contrary," he smiled. "The ideal guinea-pig for these experiments is a person just a step or two above the high-grade moron; imaginative, and if possible a little superstitious, but rather tractable and vulnerable to suggestion. You ladies are a trifle too well-balanced, too sophisticated, too hard-boiled, if you'll forgive the vulgarism——" He waved a hand expressively and let the gesture finish for him.

"Oh, dear, it would be interesting if someone — to see what happened," lamented Mrs. Smythe-Felton, "but as Professor Huling says . . . well, if one's not the type one's simply not the type."

A flash of fluttering drapery highlighted the night outside the sun porch, and Cousin Clementine smiled briefly, not entirely pleasantly, but with satisfaction.

"I think I can provide the 'guinea-pig' for your experiment, Doctor Huling," she announced; then, raising her voice, "Cousin Griselda, come here!" It was quite in character for her to omit "please" from the summons. Griselda's bounden duty was to come when called, and whether it pleased or inconvenienced her was of no moment.

IN HER season-before-last's dinner dress, pieced out with a hip-yoke to give it necessary length, ill-fitting shoes with slightly run-down heels and gray-streaked hair whose curl was patently put in with papers, Griselda was a bitter contrast to the modishly costumed and coiffed ladies who regarded her with something like the interest which a biochemist might evince in a new rabbit or white rat come to his laboratory.

"Doctor Huling, this is my husband's cousin, Miss Griselda Pancoast," Mrs. Spottswood semi-introduced.

"Cousin Griselda, Doctor Huling needs your help in an experiment." With a nod that said, "Tell her what to do; she'll do it, or she'll hear from me," she turned to the Professor.

Urbanely Doctor Huling showed the wands to Griselda, told her how to fix the hexagram and door in her mind's eye and

prepare to walk through if the door should open.

"Think of a red door, Cousin Griselda, a door of Chinese red with a gold figure drawn on it," Cousin Clementine directed.

"Not necessarily," Doctor Huling countered. "Any sort of door will do. Your bedroom door, the garage door, or just a garden gate, if you prefer. Only, be sure to think of it as having this sign on it——" He threw the wands upon the floor and gathered them together, so that they lay parallel. His small intelligent eyes narrowed at the figure made by the white markings on the sticks. It consisted of six lines, arranged thus:

"H'm," he frowned a little. "The Fourth Sign, or Li Chi. Perhaps we'd better make another cast. The Book of Rites is not especially propitious——"

"Oh," Cousin Clementine broke in, "let's try the Fourth Sign, by all means, Professor. It's all in fun, anyway."

He shot a sidelong look at her. "You insist?"

"Why not? What possible harm——"

Doctor Huling turned to Griselda. "I'll make another cast, if you'd prefer," he whispered. "The Fourth Sign's not particularly lucky, especially if you find the door leads to the past——"

Griselda laughed. It was an odd laugh, very low; a little uncertain, just a little frightened, and it seemed to hang in midair. "It doesn't matter, really," she replied, and he noticed for the first time how melodious her voice was. "Cousin Clementine would like to have us use this sign, and I know she wouldn't wish me any harm."

"Not much more than Hitler wishes to the Jews," he answered mentally; then, aloud: "All right, have you fixed the symbol in your mind?"

"Yes, Doctor Huling."

He drew a black silk handkerchief from the pocket of his linen dinner coat and bound it round her eyes. "Just relax, now," he bade soothingly. "Kneel here and fix your mind upon the door that bears the hexagram. Concentrate upon the door—the door—the door that bears the mystic hexagram," his voice sank to a sort of murmuring singsong, low, insistent, not to be denied.

GRISELDA knelt upon the cretonne sofa cushion, the impenetrable pall of utter darkness that the black hoodwink laid across her eyes, isolating her from all sense of reality. In obedience to Doctor Huling's orders she tried to make her mind a blank, to think of nothing but the cryptic six-lined figure which the markings on the Yai Ching wands had made, but despite her utmost effort other thoughts obtruded.

Thoughts of Barleywood they were, half clouded, half distinct, like memory-faces staring wistfully through the soiled panes of the dim, wiped-over years; not Barleywood as she left it when the pre-war panic of '14 gave the *coup de mort* to tottering family fortunes, sent her father to a suicide's grave and her a suppliant for alms to Northern cousins, but the Barleywood her adolescence knew.

In memory she trotted on her small bay mare along the country roads or galloped on her father's tall gray gelding while the hounds ran in full cry. The hum of fiddles and the "plinky-plank" of banjoes sounded in her mind's ear as she remembered dances in the Hall; in fancy she recalled her schoolmates at St. Mary's . . . "all, all are gone, the old familiar faces!"

The talismanic symbol seemed to glow against her eyes like lights that flash across the retina when fingers press against the

lowered lids. Green, lightning-blue, or phosphorescent yellow, it blazed before her bandaged eyes, then grew and swelled and seemed to flare and flicker. At first it shone against a background black and soft as sable velvet, but gradually this changed, seemed to take on shape and definition. There it was, a door—no, not a door, a gate; the gate to a walled garden. And as she looked at it, it swung back of its own accord, hinges whining with a faint, low squeak.

In fancy she rose from her knees and walked toward it. She recognized it. Layer on layer of bitter homesick years could not obliterate it from her memory. The scent of honeysuckle, almost overpowering in its strength and sweetness, swept around her as she laid her hand upon the gate, and as she pushed it farther open a mocking-bird's sweet liquid notes fell on her ear. Home! Home again to Barleywood, with a quarter of a century's nostalgia behind her, and the turf-ringed flagstones of the garden path before.

YET it was not quite the garden of her memory. The phlox and marigold and ragged robin still bloomed beside the path, aromatic sweetbriar and Mary Washingtons still sprawled and clambered on the rustic summer-house, Virginia creeper and English ivy crept across the red brick wall, but the place was fresher, newer, better kept than she remembered it. The turf was closely clipped, no weeds were in the angles of the wall or flower beds; it was Barleywood with a manicure and marcel, or, perhaps, a younger Barleywood.

She glanced down as she stepped and came to a full stop with indrawn breath. The feet on which she walked were smaller, narrower than hers, almost child-like in their tininess, and were shod with dainty heelless slippers of black kid, laced on with narrow cross-straps. Her stockings were of heavy, lustrous white silk. Her gown was flowered organdy, pale pastel blossoms on a ground of delicate blush pink, and its crenellated border flounced a full six inches from the ground, spreading out all round her like the bottom of a bell, or an inverted lily-cup. Between the dress hem and the little black-kid slippers showed an inch or so of white-silk stocking, but her ankles were encased in pantalets of handkerchief linen edged with a deep border of Val lace.

"Oh, my!" exclaimed Griselda weakly. She raised her dress hem a discreet six inches. Underneath the organdy was a petticoat of sheer, fine lawn, knife-tucked, and each tuck edged with baby lace. Beneath the first petticoat was another, equally light and finely made, and under that another, and another—and another, till at last there came a fifth, of starched fine linen, flounced with six-inch ruffles. Under all was a plain cream-colored underskirt of baby flannel, soft as silk and almost light as gauze.

"Oh, my!" she repeated. Her gaze had fallen on the hand that raised the fragile undergarments. It was small and slender, like her kid-cased foot, and pale as a magnolia blossom. It was not manicured, according to the modern mode, but the nails were neatly trimmed and rounded, and shone with a luster of their own. About her wrist was clasped a bracelet of woven human hair—bright, auburn, and as soft and fine as milkweed-floss—in which was set a gold-framed disk of moss agate. This was not the reddened, work-roughened, ill-kept hand belonging to Griselda Pancoast; it was a lady's hand, soft and pink-and-white, unused to toil as any lily of the field. "For goodness' sake, who *am* I?" she asked breathlessly, and put a hand against her throat. A narrow band of velvet from which hung a heart-shaped locket met her trembling fingers.

Senses whirling, she looked around her helplessly . . . these fine, soft, long-outmoded garments, this body which obeyed

her will but was not hers . . . what? . . . how? . . .

"Mis' Grisel, oh, Mis' Grisel!" the hail, called in a mellow Negro voice, came to her from the mansion's side door. "Come on ter dinner, honey; yo' pappy's waitin' in de dinin'-room, an' he don' lak ter be kep' waitin' on his vittles!"

Griselda tripped along the flagstone path, her billowing draperies floating cloud-light round her, entered the side door and crossed the wide hall. Candles burned in silver wall-sconces; their orange flames were caught and multiplied and flung back by the shining surfaces of mahogany chests and tables. An aged Negro in a flowered waistcoat, ruffled shirt and swallowtail of black broadcloth with silver buttons waited at the door of the dining-room, bowed to her with deference, as to a queen, and drew a Hepplewhite chair back for her.

At the table's farther end, beyond the silver candlesticks and the flat bouquet of flaming jacqueminots, sat a gray-clad gentleman with upward-sweeping white mustachios and a small white imperial. From the five strands of his shoulder knots she knew he was a colonel. From his gray frock coat . . . in a moment she had placed him. Great-Great-Uncle Cicero Pancoast —dead and in his soldier's grave since 1863 when General Lee drove Hooker's forces from the field at Chancellorsville.

Unbidden, words came to her lips. "I'm sorry to have kept you waiting, Papa. I was walking in the garden——" Her sentence ran low, trickled out and died like water in a brook when boys build a mud dam across it. The words were hers, although they came without volition, but the voice—although it issued from her lips she'd never heard it before.

THE Colonel smiled at her, a trifle sadly. "I know, Griselda," he replied, "with Willie and Jerome and Lucius away, there's not much life or gayety around the old place these days. But this cannot go on for long, my dear. Pope and Banks were soundly trounced, and Burnside was almost wiped out. The Yankee paltroons can't hold out much longer. They'll sue for peace before Christmas. . . ."

Griselda nodded grave agreement, but her thoughts were racing uncontrolled, and the words that came to her beat on her ears unheeded. In school she'd learned the South was overwhelmed, not defeated, but the fact that it had lost the war remained. The Colonel spoke of Pope and Banks and Burnside; that meant Cedar Mountain, Fredericksburg and Manassas had been fought. Antietam, Chancellorsville and Gettysburg were to come—this old gentleman was marked for death. . . . She stilled her racing, panic-driven thoughts, as the tired old voice went on:

"And then we'll have such times as never were seen hereabouts, my pet. England only waits our victory to renew her trade with us; they're crying for our cotton and tobacco everywhere in Europe. Our country has a rendezvous with destiny; the glories of the past will pale to insignificance——"

He paused, for the black butler set a silver platter mounded with a freight of snapping-hot fried chicken-breasts before him, and for a moment he was engrossed in the rite of serving.

It was a meal the like of which Griselda had envisioned more than once in memory as she served her quarter-century of Purgatory in her cousins' house: the chicken golden as new-minted coin, the gravy pearly-white and rich as clotted cream, spoon bread, beaten biscuits, quince and apple jelly, butter fresh-chilled from the spring house and innocent of artificial coloring, cherry tarts and hot, black, bitter coffee rendered bland by the addition of great drafts of cream and barley sugar. Finally the bottle of Madeira in its wicker cradle, with a small cut-crystal glass half filled be-

fore her, and a silver chalice at the Colonel's hand.

After dinner she sang for him in the drawing-room, accompanying herself on the German-built piano, and songs of unrequited love, tender ballads of sweet passion, and the rollicking, gay *Johnny Sands* and *Bory O'Moore*.

In the privacy of her bedchamber she surveyed herself in the tall pier-glass. Her face was long and oval, lips a little thin and rather sad, eyes large and dark with latent lights of laughter in their somber depths, lustrous brown hair shading almost into black and bursting from the confines of its pins to curl in little tendrils round her ears and down her cheeks. She knew the face that topped the slender throat, the sloping milk-white shoulders. A thousand times she'd seen it looking at her from its gilt frame in the hall. Great-Aunt Griselda gazed back at her from the mirror.

THE restful days were multiplied to lazy weeks. The Colonel rode away to join his regiment and Griselda settled down to the routine of Barleywood. Dim and dimmer grew her other self, the days of unrequited servitude melted into hazy, vague remembrance; often she had difficulty in realizing she had ever been another person than the chatelaine of Barleywood, and before a month had passed she was more than half convinced the other life had been a troubled, disturbed dream, her "knowledge" of the war's outcome and the Reconstruction miseries of the South the figment of a night vision.

But one thought kept obtruding: Always she had heard Great-Aunt Griselda died a broken-hearted, bitter old maid, her whole life blasted by her tragic romance with a Yankee officer. Was this a vision of the future vouchsafed to her in a prophetic dream in which the other incidents were only surplusage? Had she been warned against a heart-entanglement with the enemy? It seemed absurd. Barleywood lay in a calm spot in the maelstrom of the war. No Union soldiers had set foot within the region, save when they came to grips with the Confederates at Fredericksburg and were driven from the field with dreadful slaughter.

Occasionally rumors of the war came to her. On every front Confederate arms won victory. The Yankees had retired from the field at Chancellorsville, repulsed with heavy losses, but—did she "remember" this, or was it mere coincidence?—Colonel Pancoast had died gallantly as he led the last charge that routed Hooker from the field.

She changed her flowered organdies for black dimities and lawns, closed the grand piano in the drawing-room, and went about the work of organizing Barleywood. By the Colonel's will she was his only heir, and though most of the men of the community were off to war she managed to secure the help of Lawyer Smallweed to prepare new leases for the tenant farmers, find a factor for her crops in Norfolk and arrange the sale of eighty acres of rich bottom land. Mr. Smallweed had assured her that Confederate currency was sure to be redeemed, but, remembering that a pair of boots had cost her thirteen hundred dollars, paper money, she insisted that the purchase price be paid in silver, and in silver it was paid, the bright coins shipped by special wagon-post from the Treasury in Richmond.

Nor was she at a loss to use the silver. When tax assessors laid a heavy impost on her property she bought great sheafs of paper bills with her hard money and paid the levy promptly. She drove shrewd bargains with the local tradesmen, made them weigh and measure everything she bought while she stood watching. When her factor sold a cargo of tobacco to a blockade runner she demanded her share of the purchase price in golden British sover-

eigns. She caught the half-breed overseer, Jephtha, attempting to dispose of slaves' provisions to an army contractor, and with her own hand lashed him till he screamed and wept for mercy. Then she set him laboring with a hoe in the tobacco field and hired a thrifty German tenant farmer, exempt from military duty because he had a withered arm, to supervise the plantation. Barleywood was prospering as it never had when the old, gentle, ineffective Colonel owned it. When the victory was won she would be one of the richest heiresses among the landed gentry of the Potomac.

But now the tidings from the front were disquieting. Confident of victory, General Lee had crossed the Potomac, marched through Maryland and invaded Pennsylvania where the flower of his army met with Meade at Gettysburg and shattered like a wave against a rocky headland. Vicksburg fell, Atlanta had been sacked and burned, the lush valley of the Shenandoah was swept with fire and sword until "a crow which flew across it had to carry its own provender."

Here and there came rumors of invaders' forage parties. Cattle and horses were taken, homes were burned, standing crops destroyed, houses ransacked for their silverware and jewelry. The Negro slaves were terrified. "De Yankees" might come any moment, breathing fire and brimstone fumes, lashing their spiked tails, goring hapless pickaninnies with their sharp brass-pointed horns.

IT TOOK possibly a minute for the sounds to batter through the ramparts of her sleep, but when she opened her eyes she was wide awake. The air that flowed in through the open windows had a predawn chill, the bedside candle flickered in its etched glass shade and cast grotesqueries of goblin shadows on the whitewashed walls.

Griselda sat up listening, every sense alert. Her soft dark hair was disarranged from sleeping and made a sensuous warm cloud round her face and shoulders. A little moist, the light batiste of her night-robe clung to her lissome figure, followed every curve and each small roundness almost like a second skin. Little flecks of curiosity stirred in her dark eyes.

The noises in the barnyard came again; men's murmured words, a low laugh, now and then a muttered curse; the clink of metal against metal and the clomp of shod hooves on the hard-packed ground as horses stamped. She threw the sheet and blanket back and pattered to the window. In the dull effulgence of a lantern's glow she saw them, men with sabers and revolvers belted to their waists, blue trousers tucked in high-topped boots, blue monkey-jackets piped with yellow. Yankee cavalry, raiders; horse-thieves!

Heedlessly she dashed across the hall and down the rear stairs, flung the back door wide and raced across the kitchen garden to the barnyard.

Arms out, she flung herself before the stable door, a pale white figure, cross-shaped, as if she had been crucified against the weather-silvered boards.

"How dare you?" she demanded hotly. "Leave my land at once, you thieving scoundrels!"

A snicker answered her defiance. "Twig th' shameless Rebel hussy, comin' out in 'er bedgown!" chuckled a trooper as he started toward her, hand outstretched to shove her from his way.

"Halt! Don't touch her, any of you!" the command came with sharp authority, and an officer stepped from the band of shadow circling the disk of lanternlight. By the twin bars on his shoulders she recognized him as a captain.

"I'm sorry, ma'am, to trespass on you this way," he apologized, "but this is war, and orders are to commandeer all livestock for the army——" As he spoke he bent

with stiff precision from the hips and raised a gloved hand to the brim of his slouch hat, holding the salute while he addressed her.

Despite her rage and excitement she found the gesture interesting, arresting. Southern soldiers were just gentlemen in arms, their social intercourse was governed by the dictates of civilian courtesy. This man was different. Something in his bearing and demeanor, the very way he moved and walked and stood, proclaimed him soldier by profession, trained and vowed and dedicated to the cause of Mars as doctors might be bound by oath to Æsculapius or priests be wedded to the Church. He was lithe and lean and handsome with a grace and ease of movement almost feline. His hair was very black and shining, not with bear's grease or pomade, but with a luster of its own, and it was cut so short it almost seemed to bristle on his head. His black mustache was close-cropped—it seemed scarcely more than a third eyebrow—and his beard the smallest she had ever seen on a man's face, like a hairy little beetle that had lighted on his chin and nestled underneath his lower lip. Hard riding and long duty had almost exhausted him, but the weariness that paled his face did not reach to his smiling gray eyes or his pleasant mouth.

Griselda's heart gave a cold, nauseating lurch. This handsome debonair man in the well-cut blue uniform, this Yankee soldier, was he? . . . could this be? . . .

He was still speaking, and she caught his words through the dim fog-whorls of her spinning thoughts: "—unless you are prepared to offer proof of loyalty to the Union."

"Loyalty?" she echoed scornfully, and her voice had the hard raucousness of tearing paper. "My loyalty is to my country, sir. We recognize no alien sovereignty!"

"I feared as much," he answered and she saw the laugh-lights vanish from his eyes. "I regret, therefore, it is my painful duty to sequester your livestock as contraband of war." He spoke without inflection or emotion, like one who reads a formal document, but as her hot tears started she saw his hard gaze soften as a twinkle of amusement tinged with pity lighted in his eyes.

Now she was crying tears of rage mixed with embarrassment. Realization came to her and drove the hot, shamed blood into her throat and cheeks and brow. She stood before these men, these enemies of her country, these trespassers upon her land, in nothing but her nightgown. For the first time she became aware of the night chill, of the silhouette her body made against the breeze-blown linen of her gown, of her bare feet soiled with dust and dung of the barnyard. With a gesture of instinctive modesty she crossed her arms above her bosom, as if to draw a sheltering cloak about her.

Next instant she was lifted in a pair of blue-sleeved arms and borne across the stable yard, through the kitchen garden and the back door of the mansion.

"I'm sorry that we have to do this, ma'am," the captain apologized as he set her on her feet, "but war is war, and orders have to be obeyed." Then with another salute he left her.

Griselda lay in bed until the setting moon had left the night dim under the high stars, and the silver pallor of the dawn gave way to amethyst and rose lights in the eastern sky. But sleep was not for her. The clatter of accouterments, the muffled voices of the troopers, the pounding of the horses' hooves, the outraged lowing of her cattle driven from their comfortable stalls to slaughter, and the squeals and grunts of mortally offended pigs routed from their sties would have kept her awake even if a more insistent dread had not gnawed at her brain like a maggot. A dozen times she clasped her hands until her fingertips went white and bloodless

and her nails bit in her knuckles as she prayed with fervor bordering on hysteria, "Dear Lord, sweet, pitying Lord, don't—please don't let the Yankee come into my life. But, dear Lord, if it must be that he shall come, grant that he be the man who bore me in his arms tonight!"

THE troop made headquarters at Barleywood. Officers and non-commissioned officers slept in her guest rooms, men made barracks of the largest barn, and from the paddock where they kept their mounts they rode off every day—more often in the night—to raid the barns and stables, chicken-houses and pig-sties of neighboring plantations. Griselda watched the troopers and officers eat up her substance like Pharoah's locusts, saw her home-brewed beer and home-pressed cider disappear like water in a sandbank down the troopers' thirsty throats and her choicest wines served in the dining-room where Captain Delatour O'Donnell and his two lieutenants ate in feudal grandeur, served by the silent-footed, frightened butler as if they had been gentlemen, not sons of Yankee tradesmen. Her own meals were served to her in the upstairs sitting-room, and when necessity compelled her to descend the stairs she passed the Yankee soldiers and their officers with averted eyes.

Still, woman-like, she saw more with her seemingly studied inattention than a man could see by close inspection. Captain O'Donnell puzzled her. He was in his middle thirties, she surmised, for when she saw him in the daylight little flecks of gray showed in his coal-black hair, and at the corners of his eyes were little nests of wrinkles, reminiscent of long years of gazing into sun and wind. His soldiers stood in awe of him, she knew. So did the boyish subaltern and the older, brown-mustached lieutenant. When one of these gave orders to the troopers obedience was sometimes slow in coming; when the Captain spoke, the troopers leaped to do his bidding, "as if they had been trained beasts and he their trainer," she thought scornfully. Yet——

He puzzled her. His voice was low and musical when not raised in command, and there was a quality in it, a likeness to her own pronunciation, which sounded strange on Yankee lips. Sometimes he said "you all" for plural "you." Sometimes he swore, and when he did there was a hard, sharp bitterness about the oaths that fairly made her flesh creep.

THEY had been quartered on her for a week when shortly after reveille Captain O'Donnell called the slaves together in the lot between the summer kitchen and the herb garden. Spruce and trim, his troopers ranged in company front behind him; each side and slightly to the rear his lieutenants stood with drawn sabers. The bugler stood at his elbow, and at a nod blew "attention." Then the Captain drew a folded paper from his tunic pocket, shook it out and read in a hard, formal voice: "By the President, a proclamation—On and after January 1, 1863, all persons held as slaves by persons in rebellion against the Government of the United States shall be thenceforth and forever free."

Stolidly, with no more understanding of the words than if they had been Latin, the Negroes listened to the reading. When he finished they looked at him silently, awaiting dismissal. "You know what that means, don't you?" he asked as the silence grew and stretched. "You, there, Abraham"—he nodded to the butler who stood in the front row of the servants—"don't you know what's happened?"

"Cap'n, nawsuh," answered Abraham with an obsequious bow. "Can we all go back to our wuk, now, please, suh?"

"You damned old fool," O'Donnell began, then stopped with a short laugh. "You don't have to go back to your work, any of

you. You're free men and women, now. No one can give you orders which you have to obey unless you feel like it. You can leave this place whenever you may wish, and no one can make you come back."

"May I say something, Captain O'Donnell?" Cool and self-possessed, proudly defiant as Marie Antoinette before the Revolutionary tribunal, Griselda stepped around the left flank of the rank of troopers. He glanced at her. In her plain black frock, without a touch of color, save in ripe lips and flaming cheeks, she seemed positively regal. Her glance fell on—and went directly through—him. As for any awareness she showed of his presence, he might have been a hundred miles away.

"It's irregular, but I see no objection to your speaking, ma'am," he answered with a salute.

"Thank you." Icicles seemed to congeal on her syllables as she turned her back on him and addressed her ex-slaves. "The Captain tells you you are free," she announced. "So you are. No one can order you to work, or even make you stay upon this land, but no one is obliged to feed or clothe or shelter you. If you wish to go you may, but if you go you'll have to go at once. I'll give no food or clothes or shelter to those who do not work for it. And if you leave Barleywood, where will you go, what will you do? No one will hire you as servants or field hands—there are too many men and women out of work already. Those of you who wish to stay may do so, just as always, and they may work for food and lodging. If any of you wishes to leave, let him go quickly, for I'll have no loafers on my land."

"Well said, ma'am," she heard O'Donnell murmur, but she gave no indication that she heard.

Jephtha, the ex-overseer, weary and resentful of the field work she had assigned him, elected to leave Barleywood; so did half a dozen of the unwed field hands. The other servants, scandalized at the idea of leaving "Mis' Grisel'," with or without permission, went about accustomed duties as if no such thing as the Emancipation Proclamation had ever been inscribed in the book of history.

GRISELDA wakened with a start. The noise that broke her sleep had been a tiny one, the very faintest clink of metal striking metal, but low and furtive as it was, it terrified her. She opened her eyes cautiously and looked toward the bureau from which the sound had seemed to emanate. The mirror over it was an oblong of shadow, reflecting the dim shadows of the room. She stared at it, saw the tiny point of flame the bedside candle made against the polished surface, saw—terror touched her soul like a cold flame. Across the darkened oblong of the mirror moved a shape, dim and indistinct, and only slightly darker than the darkness of the room.

Stealthily it moved, and now she heard another gentle clink. A hand was in her jewel box, rifling it of rings and brooches, ear-drops, necklaces.

She was not conscious she had made a sound, but the intruder heard it, and swung around to face her. Now the faint rays of the candle shone full on him, and she felt a sudden tightening in her throat. Her heart began to jerk like something in its death throes and she fought for breath. Picked out by the dim candlelight, hideous with hatred as the carved face of a gargoyle, she saw the saddle-yellow countenance of Jephtha, her ex-overseer. He moved toward her so silently that only the slight creaking of a floor-board marked the pressure of his feet, and she caught the nauseating reek of raw corn whisky. He was drunk; not harmlessly, but crazily, insanely drunk, the last faint vestige of whatever self-control

he had drowned by the fiery, sense-destroying liquor.

A lambent gleam of candle-ray fell on the butcher-knife in his hand, lit the staring, bloodshot eyes, the slavering lips and the pink tongue that flicked across them like a beast's.

"Lay still, Mis' Grisel', honey," he commanded in a whisper. " 'Taint no one but pore Jephtha yere. 'Member how yuh flogged him an' sent him laborin' in de fiel'? 'Member how yuh done oppressed him? Jephtha's gonna take some lettle bits o' jew'lry fo' ter pay his way up No'th, but 'fore he goes he's gonna tend ter yuh—yuh jes' lay still and wait fo' him, he ain't a-gonna keep yuh waitin' long——"

Her scream of terror geysered up; a dreadful, bubbling shriek of unadulterated horror. It rose and flickered like a blast of flame, cut through the sultry darkness like a white-hot blade. A hand was on her mouth, rough fingers gripped her throat. She struggled with the frenzied strength of hysteria, wanted to faint, to die, but could not.

Feet padded on the floor, a voice hailed, "What the devil?"

"Cap'n, suh, yuh'd best be 'tendin' ter yo' business; Jephtha don' want fo' ter kill yuh, suh, but——" The sullen, drunken defiance went out of him with a small squeak, like a rat's squeal when the trap snaps on it. She watched in fascination as the saber blade flashed forward, disappeared, sheathed in the overseer's body, then reappeared again, a little globule of bright blood suspended from its point as if a ruby had been set in the white steel.

Swooning, she fell back upon the bed, but consciousness was only half gone. Through lowered lids she noted every line of her rescuer, and a longing to surrender herself to him flooded through her.

He was in his shirt and trousers, sleeves rolled back and neck-band open, and the corded strength of his muscles was beautiful to look at as a piece of classic statuary. On his forearm was a tattooed device, a wolf's head ermine erased, with a scroll and mantle under it. "His family crest?" she wondered as she let herself sink into blissful, overpowering darkness.

NEXT morning she came down to breakfast. The lieutenants were on duty and the Captain occupied the Colonel's old chair at the dining-table. He rose and bowed as she entered, and she acknowledged the courtesy with a condescending nod. But inwardly she glowed. He was a gentleman, despite his blue uniform.

"I am indebted to you, Captain," she began, then, on a sudden impish impulse of snobbery, *"Je suis votre redevable, Monsieur le Capitaine."*

Without a second's hesitation, naturally —and in far better French than hers!— he answered simply, *"Il n'y a pas de quoi, Mademoiselle; n'y faites pas attention!"*

"But I do wish to mention it," she answered as Abraham drew out her chair and seated her in her accustomed place. "However much it hurts my pride to be indebted to a Yankee——"

"Who says that I'm a Yankee?" he broke in, laughter struggling with annoyance in his voice.

"Your uniform——"

"Two years ago I wore the red shirt of the Garibaldian *carbinieri,* but I was no Italian; before that I was in the uniform of Napoleon III, Emperor of the French, yet I was no Frenchman."

"What are you, then?" she persisted. "Where were you born?"

"In Baltimore."

"In Baltimore," she echoed, "a Marylander, a native of our Old Line State—and in a Yankee uniform!" But she smiled a small, shy smile as she said it, and the meal proceeded to its close with no more talk of politics.

SHE learned his history by degrees. Son of an Irish emigré, a brilliant advocate and one-time judge, and a French mother, he had finished schooling in America at seventeen and been sent to the Sorbonne to perfect himself in Civil Law before returning to become a student in his father's office. The routine of the class room wearied him, and he had no respect for Justinian or the Pandects of Imperial Rome.

Every minute he would filch from studying was spent in *salles d'armes;* when an opportunity to study at the Ecole Speciale Militaire came he turned his back upon the law forever, and two years later was commissioned *sous-lieutenant* of cavalry in the army of Napoleon III.

He had not long to wait for his baptism of fire. With his command he went to Sebastopol, helped assault the Malakoff and hold it in the face of fierce counter-attacks.

Three years later, in the Austro-Sardinian War, he rode at Magenta and Solferino, then, disgusted with Napoleon's duplicity, resigned from the French army and enlisted in the forces of Giuseppe Garibaldi, helping to bring Sicily into the new Italian nation.

Then came the news of civil war at home, and, a veteran of three campaigns at twenty-five, he sailed for New York, offered his sword to the Federal Government and was given a commission as a captain of cavalry.

Desdemona never listened with more thoughtful-eyed attention to the story of Othello's voyage and travail than Griselda did as Delatour O'Donnell told her of his life in camps and cities of the Old World. When he was done she knew all he had meant to tell her, and something more: He had wide experience of life and danger; battle, war and sudden death were as familiar to him as the breath he drew, but of women and their subtleties he knew no more than any school-boy wrestling with the forms of grammar and arithmetic.

THE moon came slowly up above the eastern hills like a great disk of scorched gold. So swollen was it, so heavy, that for a time it seemed unable to clear the horizon. There it gleamed, its lower rim obscured, and the hollyhocks which fringed the bottom of the garden seemed to be drawn upon its face with charcoal. All about them was the warm, sweet scent of roses. Here and there a bird chirped sleepily, crickets shrilled their low, insistent laughter in the tangled grasses. Save for the occasional stamping of the horses in the paddock there was no other sound. They sat in the small summer house, unspeaking, silent and content to be together. At length:

"We're leaving for the south tomorrow," Delatour announced. "The orders came today."

"Oh!" her exclamation was a sudden cry of pain. "Must—must you go so soon? I had hoped——"

"So had I—Griselda," he paused a moment as he called her name, the first time he had used it in addressing her; then: "This war can't last forever. When I come back will—will I find you waiting?"

He heard her catch her breath, but whether it were sigh or gasp she uttered he could not be sure. "Now I know," she murmured, and her voice was deep with sobs. "Now I know the way her heart was broken!"

"Griselda dear, *cherie,* what is it that you say? You love me, don't——"

"Love you?" her hot words stopped him. "Better than my life, my breath, my heart's blood. And that is why my heart is breaking, dear. It is my doom to love you always, to be waiting for you to the end of time, yet not to have you, never give myself to you.

"If you were truly a Yankee it might

be different; you would know no better. But you're a Southerner by birth, a traitor to your country and your people—" Now the sobs broke through her voice and she fell silent, pressing both hands to her laboring breast, fighting down the frantic misery which seemed to close upon her heart like a vise.

"If I were in the other army, would it make a difference?" he asked her softly. "No one respects a turncoat, but——"

She flashed him a quick smile. It was as if a candle had been lighted behind the somber velvet of her eyes. "You wouldn't be a turncoat, love of mine. You'd merely be returning to the old allegiance. You left the French because your conscience disapproved their politics. How can you bear to tread your native country, your Maryland, your people, underfoot? How can you let them make you steal the goods and chattels of defenseless women—theft is theft, whatever name you choose to give it. Did our soldiers rob the Yankees when they marched through Pennsylvania? Did they steal and burn and pillage?" Again emotion stilled her voice.

He was busy with his thoughts till: "And I may come to you when war is done, if I forsake the Union cause——"

"Yes, *yes,* my love!" Her lips were soft and alluring, her breath was warm and tender on his cheek. She was another Judith in the tent of Holophernes, another Jael enticing Sisera—"If you do this for love of me I shall be waiting for you, surely—I and all I have are yours when you come back to me, however long the waiting is until you come again, my very dearest."

He drew her to him. Her lips parted and her body pressed against his fiercely, then went yieldingly flaccid in his arms.

Next morning when the bugles sounded reveille Lieutenant Bright was forced to take command. The Captain was not to be found, nor had his bed been slept in.

ST. JOHN'S DAY passed, and Michaelmas; the theatre of operations shifted to the south as Grant pushed on to Richmond. No word came to Griselda from her lover, but every night she set a candle in the window of her chamber; every night before she went to bed she put the curtains back and whispered as she faced the south: "Good-night, my sweet; sleep well and dream of me, and oh! come to me quickly."

He came more quickly than she'd hoped, but not as she'd envisioned his return.

Jubal Early's raiders had met Sheridan at Cedar Creek, been shattered like a potter's vessel, and were in retreat. The pounding of the flying hooves against the road was followed by a pounding on the door. When she went to answer the alarm a man fell stumbling across the threshold. His gray blouse hung upon his back in tattered shreds, as if it had been ripped by claws, his right arm dangled helplessly beside him, and a smear of blood spread clear across his right shoulder and down his sleeve. A steady ruddy trickle traced its way across his hand and dribbled from the useless, helpless fingers.

"Griselda—dearest!" he called in a bleak, hollow voice, and lurched across the doorsill to fall upon his face.

She could not carry him, or even lift him, but she brought water in a basin and a flask of brandy, cut away his shredded coat and blood-stained shirt with her scissors and bandaged his wound with strips ripped from her fine petticoat. Then, when she'd put a pillow underneath his head, she sat beside him on the floor and held his hand in hers. She watched him in the candle-glow, thinking how fine his face was, his thin-drawn, handsome dark face with its features clear-cut as the image on a coin, and as immobile. Once or twice she smoothed the hair back from his forehead and bathed his temples with the last drops of her hoarded bottle of cologne.

"Delatour," she whispered softly, "Delatour, beloved."

At last he stirred, tried to rise, and sank back with a feeble groan. "Have to go," he muttered thickly. "Can't stay here. They'll be coming for me any minute—mustn't find me here. They'll arrest you for harboring an enemy—a deserter——"

"Hush, dear," she bade him softly as she dropped a light kiss on his brow; "no one's goin' to come and get you. You're home with me, now, and you shall never, never leave me any more."

Once in a lifetime comes a moment of fulfilment, a moment so completely satisfying that all time seems to halt for it, when there is neither looking backward with regret nor looking forward with anticipation; when everything is perfect with perfection like the everlasting, never-changing calm and happiness of Paradise. Such a moment came to Griselda as she sat in the hall by her fallen warrior with the candlelight upon her gleaming black hair and the lovelight glowing in her eyes.

"Delatour," she murmured once again, "my one, my true, my only best-beloved!"

Early in the evening there had been a young moon in the cloud-washed sky. Now the moon had foundered in a tumbling surf of clouds, and a keening blast foretold the coming of the storm. The wind sank from an eery scream to a dull, sighing wail, then to a lower, more ominous note. It did not seem to howl or moan so much as mutter. It stalked round and round the house, trying doors and shutters, rattling windows, rapping with malicious, ghostly fingers at the casements, then fleeing with a spiteful, cachinnating scream of laughter.

Suddenly, with a high, shrieking roar, the storm swooped down. Rain sweated on the windows, turning them to bright black mirrors in which every little object of the dim old rooms reflected dully.

And with the coming of the tempest came another sound, the splashing tramp of horses' hooves, the jangling clank of metal striking against metal, a hoarse, imperative command: "Dismount; surround the house; squad forward!"

When their pounding on the door met no response they burst it in. She turned her head and looked at them, not with defiance, almost without interest.

"You there on the floor!" a loud voice dinned in her ears. "Is that man a rebel—d'ye hear?"

They did not seem like men; they were just things. Things in dark blue, slicked with rain until the blue was shining-black. They had no faces, only eyes that glared and glowed at her—and voices; raucous, snarling voices that beat against her shrinking brain like lash-strokes.

Something tramped across the bare and polished floor, stood beside her, looking down. "By God," it bellowed with a guffaw, "it's O'Donnell, the deserter. Pick him up, some of you—make a litter for him. We'll take him to headquarters."

Then she was alone, sitting on the floor, one slim hand smoothing the pillow on which his head had rested, caressing the dent where his shining hair had pressed. Words beat against her mind's ear dully, muffled like the sound of surf heard far away:

"Great-Aunt Griselda died with a broken heart . . . she loved a Yankee officer. . . ."

The court-martial did not take long. The evidence was quickly heard. Captain Bright, once lieutenant under O'Donnell, had been in charge of the detail which made the arrest. He recognized his former captain, missing since the previous June, wounded and in rebel uniform. There was no testimony in defense. The sentence could be only one thing.

She tried to get to them to testify, to see the president of the court. They would not let her in.

At last she forced her way into the pro-

vost marshal's office. "I made him do it, sir," she confessed. "He loved me, and I tempted him; seduced him from his duty by promising to marry him. It is I, not he, who should be shot. I am the guilty one; the fault is wholly mine."

The provost marshal, Colonel Webster, was a bank's attorney in civilian life. They said he had ice-water in his veins, that he was never known to smile, that he could look a man square in the eye and take his last dollar, or sell the roof above a widow's head without the quiver of an eyelash. His eyes were gray.

Strange, empty eyes they were, cold as frosted windows with the blinds pulled down, but with someone peeping skilfully beneath them. Steel-bowed spectacles shimmered between his gray eyebrows; his gaunt, ascetic face was unrelieved by any tinge of color in his cheeks or in the tight line of his lips.

"We have no case against you, Madam," he told her, speaking precisely, as he did on Sundays back in Brooklyn when he read the lesson for the Sabbath school. "And the sentence of the court is that the traitor suffer death by hanging, not by musketry. Women have been temptresses since Eve and Delilah and Jezebel. It is the man's part to resist temptation."

"Then grant me one favor," she begged. "When the sentence has been carried out, may I have his—his body, to be buried in my family plot, where I may lie beside him?"

"Spies' and traitors' bodies are buried in quicklime. I'm sorry I cannot grant your request, Madam. Good day," answered Colonel Webster.

THEY let her see him for a little time the night before they hanged him. The Irish sentinel on guard before his cell came to about face and stood with his back to them, humming a snatch of tune to drown their conversation from his ears:

"Belave me if all those endearin' young cha'ms
Which I gaze on so fondly today . . ."

Her eyes were wide, suffused with tears, but star-bright as they came to rest on him. Her lips were trembling like those of a little girl who weeps for her lost doll, and she held her little pink-and-white hands to him as she said his name with broken helplessness. "Oh, my dear, my darling."

He took her hands in his, held her cheeks between his palms and drew her face against his bars. "Don't let it break your heart, dear," he besought. "It is not hard to die; I've looked death in the face a thousand times and never been afraid——"

"But I'm losing you, we're losing each other," she sobbed brokenly. "I promised myself to you if you did this thing for me; now I can't keep my promise——"

"Hush, dear," he ordered almost sharply. "You don't believe this life is everything; no more do I. In the morning I'll step through a door; the lockless door that lets into Tomorrow's garden. Do you remember what you told me once, 'I'll be waiting for you, however long it is until you come'? So shall I be waiting for you in Tomorrow's land, my dearest, for there we're given back that which we most loved here."

"But I'm unworthy," she moaned softly. "It was I who brought you to this—oh, my darling, what if I'm not permitted to come to you——"

"Then I shall come for you, my little dear one; never fear," he comforted.

For a little while they spoke no more, for though the bars were between them they clung and kissed, arms circled round each other, lips and hearts together in a final long farewell.

"Now, dear," he gasped at last, releasing her for a moment, "one last kiss for long remembrance, then good-bye. I'll close my eyes and stop my ears so I can't

hear you leaving, and when I open them again, you'll be gone, but I'll have the memory of your lips on mine until we meet again in the enchanted land beyond the door to Tomorrow."

There was no sunrise the next day, but he was hanged just half an hour after reveille.

She had spent the night upon her knees before the altar of the little village church, praying not for his soul, but for hers, begging that her spirit might be loosed when his went forth . . . she heard the bugles heralding the sunless dawn, heard the ruffling of the drums that told the drop had fallen, and begging for unconsciousness that would not come, she beat her forehead on the altar rail.

The wood seemed strangely soft. It felt more like a hand against her brow and cheeks, the drum-rolls seemed to change their tempo and timbre, to be translated into words. . . .

SHE was kneeling on a sofa cushion in the center of the floor of Cousin Clementine's sun porch, and Professor Huling stood beside her holding the silk handkerchief with which he'd bound her eyes in one hand, slapping her softly on the cheeks and brow with the other. "Wake up, Miss Pancoast," he commanded. "You've been unconscious almost five minutes!"

Griselda's hand flew to her mouth. "Five minutes?" she repeated brokenly.

"Almost," the professor assured her.

She felt the roughness of the fingers on her lips and held her hand out. It was neither small nor slim nor white. It was reddened, work-worn, slightly swollen at the joints with arthritis, roughened at the finger-tips from needlework, the ugly unkempt hand of one who drudges for her daily bread.

She looked around her. Eight curious ladies gazed at her expectantly. "What did you see, Griselda?" Cousin Clementine demanded. "You were unconscious quite a while."

"I—it seemed that I was back in Barleywood," Griselda answered brokenly. "I thought I saw the old place as it was before——"

"You would," Cousin Clementine broke in. "I don't think we need detain you further.

"She's like all Southerners," she confided to Professor Huling and her friends as Griselda left. "They're always living in the past, you know — suffering from a carry-me-back-to-old-Virginny complex. Goodness only knows what they'd do if they went back. I notice most of them are glad enough to come North when they have the chance. They're sure of something to eat here, at least."

She turned bright eyes on Doctor Huling. "You really think that's all she saw, Professor? Just that tumbledown old mansion?"

"I think it likely, Mrs. Spottswood. As we grow older the urge to regress to our childhood and its scenes grows stronger. Her former home's associated in her mind with carefree irresponsibility—it's a form of uterophilia."

"I see," responded Cousin Clementine, who had not the faintest idea what uterophilia was, but connected it in some vague way with the writings of Sir Thomas More —or was it Plato, or Dorothy Thompson?

GRISELDA paused before the village drug store. It was a five-mile walk back to Lake Acres, and the day was searing-hot. She wanted a big chocolate soda, a big, sweat-beaded glass of luscious dark-brown syrup with a double scoop of creamy-white vanilla ice-cream in it and a bubbling crown of foam above, but chocolate sodas were fifteen cents, and she had only a dime tied in the corner of her handkerchief. Still, you could buy an orange phosphate for a dime, and that at

least would be cool. She pushed the swinging screen doors open, climbed upon a stool before the fountain and prepared to give her order when the spruce young soda clerk had done with the distinguished-looking gentleman who occupied the stool next to hers.

"Son," she heard the gentleman inquire, "can you tell me where th' Spottswood place is, 'round here? Ah've looked all over Long Island, an' one says go that way, an' one says something else, but Ah don't seem able to locate Lake Acres."

Griselda warmed toward the inquirant. His accent was so lushly Southern, his rich voice so redolent of home—"I live at Lake Acres, sir," she ventured timidly. "If you'd like I'll gladly show you the way—"

"Will you, indeed, ma'am?" he answered gratefully. "Ah'd appreciate it if you would." He eyed her, as in doubt, a moment; then:

"Ah was just about to have some light refreshment, ma'am. May Ah have the honor of yo' company in a chocolate soda?"

She knew she shouldn't do it. He was a total stranger, it was like a pick-up which she'd heard her younger cousins describe, but—nothing in the world looked quite so good as the tall chocolate ice-cream sodas which the neat young white-clad man was already concocting. "That would be very nice," she answered primly.

She sipped and spooned in silent bliss a moment, then turned amazed eyes on her host, for he was asking: "You're not by any chance a Pancoast, are you, ma'am? It seems to me you favor an old friend of mine from down near Carthagena Crick—"

"Crick!" When had she heard a creek called "crick" before? Tears started to her eyes as she replied, "I am Griselda Pancoast."

"One of the Barleywood Pancoasts? Well, well, this surely is a sight for tired eyes, ma'am. Ah"—he slipped down from the stool and made a formal bow—"Ah am George Ormandie, of St. Mary's City, at yo' service."

The open motor car in which he drove her to Lake Acres seemed bigger than a Baldwin locomotive, and there must have been a ton of chromium trimming on it.

He was a most distinguished gentleman. His white hair, white mustache and white imperial gave him a look resembling General Fitzhugh Lee, whom she remembered from the Spanish War days. His linen suit, Panama hat, expensive shoes and well-kept hands bespoke a man of wealth. On the little finger of his right hand was a heavy seal ring, its device incised in a dull red stone. As he swung the steering-wheel to turn the car into Lake Acres' driveway she caught her breath in a short gasp. The crest was a wolf's head ermine erased, and under it was cut a scroll and mantle. For the time it took to draw a deep, long breath, Griselda Pancoast, drudge-cousin of the wealthy Gerald Spottswoods, took leave of her thin, aging body, and was once again a beautiful young woman lying in a half-swoon on a high old-fashioned bed and noticing through half-closed eyes a family crest tattooed upon a virile young man's sword-arm. Then the car slid to a noiseless stop and he was handing her from it as if she were some great lady and he her cavalier.

IT APPEARED that Mr. Ormandie had come North for the sole purpose of buying an old Southern farm from Cousin Gerald. The land was valueless, and Cousin Gerald would gladly have disposed of it at fifty cents an acre, until he saw the Ormandie motor. Then the unearned increment of the farm took a sudden stratospheric flight, and the deal was closed at ten dollars an acre. Cousin Gerald's eyes almost popped from their sockets at the size of the roll from which the new bills were stripped.

Mr. George K. Ormandie was one who should be sedulously cultivated, Cousin Gerald thought; so he invited him to dinner, gave him cards at some good clubs, and set about the work of cultivation with expert attention to detail.

Cousin Clementine declared the age of miracles was far from being past. Mr. Ormandie showed every sign of being smitten with the obviously absent charms of Cousin Griselda. He took her to the theatres and night clubs, on long drives about the country, even to the races. In August he proposed to her. They were married on the eve of Michaelmas in St. Anselm's Church at Quogue, and set out for Atlantic City the same afternoon.

GRISELDA looked about her timidly, not at her husband, but at the sumptuous sitting-room of the Hotel Graynow's finest suite. She was afraid, more frightened than she'd ever been in all her life. Sixty years of spinisterhood conditions one for celibacy. Now she was a wife, a married woman, and—what did one do in such circumstances?—what was expected of one? . . .

Still with her eyes averted she took her hat and gloves off and dropped them on the couch beside her handbag. "George," she whispered diffidently, "there's something I must ask you. The crest on your seal ring, is it—where did you——"

A laugh stopped her; not the hearty throaty laugh of her husband, but a different sort of laugh, lighter, younger, and with a note of tenderness in it. "Griselda," said a voice—not the voice of George K. Ormandie.

She looked up, startled. Her husband was nowhere in sight, but she recognized the man who smiled at her, his bright black hair, his small mustache and beard, his clear gray laughing eyes. "Delatour," she whispered unbelievingly. "Oh, my——"

Involuntarily she held her hands out to him, and recoiled as she saw them. Though manicured and carefully cared for, they were still the corded, slightly gnarled hands of an aging woman.

"You—you're just as you were—I'm an old woman, a hideous old hag!" she wailed.

She glanced down, as his pointing finger indicated. "Why, I'm on the floor—I'm lying there——" she began, then stopped in stark bewilderment. How could she be lying quietly like that, and yet be looking at herself?

"Where is my—Mr. Ormandie?" she asked dully. Somehow, her thoughts would not behave. If this woman on the floor at her feet were the real she, then who——

"My dear, can't you understand?" the young man's voice replied. "There never was a George K. Ormandie. I only wore that name—and form—to come to you. Remember? I told you I'd come to you if you didn't come to me. See——"

She felt her hand grasped lightly, felt herself pulled forward gently—over her own body, lying there so still and white—felt a sudden sharp, heart-piercing pang Then she was in his arms, her lips on his, her pulses beating out the rhythm of his name: "Delatour—Delatour!"

Now he put her from him gently, but retained her hands in his. "Look at you now," he ordered, laughing.

Framed in the mirror they stood side by side and hand in hand, just as they'd stood in the old garden when the guns were bellowing defiance and attack around the works of Petersburg.

"See, dearest one, the door," he bade.

Far back in the mirror, like a portal seen at the end of a corridor, a gate swung in the breeze, an unlatched gate that pierced a garden wall of weathered brick. She felt the pressure of his hand on hers, and stepped beside him toward the swinging gate.

A mocking-bird was singing as they entered the old garden.

"The watchers are not human, they will not sleep or rest."

King of the World's Edge

By H. WARNER MUNN

An odyssey of a strange voyage to America in King Arthur's time
—a fascinating story of heroic adventures and eery thrills
—an absorbing weird tale, crammed with action

Prolog

AFTER the hurricane which swept Key West almost bare, a cylinder of bronze, green with verdigris and thinned by the years, was dug out from coral and debris by a veteran engaged in the work of reconstruction. He, perceiving it to be a most ancient relic, though he mistakenly believed it to date from the Spanish occupation of that island, realized

that it might be of more value if unopened. So he took it to the museum in his home town, at which I happen to be curator.

I opened it in his presence, being promised 10 per cent of any valuables it might contain, should they chance to be of only ordinary interest.

We were both surprised to find in it a tightly rolled bundle of parchment, upon which was painted in rugged soldier's Latin the following letter.

As I translated it, the eyes of my caller sparkled, for he recognized a bold kindred spirit across the years.

I, too, thrilled, but with the zest of the antiquarian; for I knew that at the time of writing, Rome had perished, the barbarians had dismembered the Western Empire, and only in Constantinople survived anything of Roman pomp and power. Yet here, at a date forty years after the fall of Rome, was a man writing to a Roman emperor!

Had the letter been in time to have been of use, the history of the world would have been far different; but it miscarried, and with it all the hopes of its valiant writer. Let him speak now for himself.

1. The Lost Legion

TO WHATEVER Emperor rules in Rome—Greetings:

I, Ventidius Varro, centurion under Arthur the Imperator of Britain, and now King of the Western Edge of the World, known here by such titles as Nuitziton, Huitzilopochtli and Atoharo, send these relations by my only son who seeks your confirmation of my kingship, that he may rule in my stead when I am done.

It is now, I estimate, full five generations since the legions finally withdrew from Britain, and though I may be, in the early part of these writings, but re-telling what by now is common knowledge in Rome, I cannot be sure of that and it should be told. Bear therefore, I pray, with the garrulous reminiscences of an old soldier, scarred in the services of a country he has never seen.

It is hard for me to believe that since I left Britain forty years ago, it may not have been recovered from the Saxon pirates; yet I must assume it, for I remember well that for a hundred years previously we received little or no help.

Nay, when in my great-grandfather's time we Romano-Britons sent to Aetius for aid, pleading that the recall of the legion he had sent left us defenseless, did we get even one cohort in return?

Not though we warned that Britain would be lost—as it has been, unless indeed it is true as Myrdhinn the seer has told me, that Britain was discarded wilfully as of little value to Rome.

How can I credit this, knowing well the fertile soil, the rich mines, the teeming fisheries of Britain? There must be another reason, and Myrdhinn has said it.

An age is dying, the whole world tottering to ruin, over-run by barbarians as we in Britain were; yet for a hundred years no news crossed the seas to us, other than garbled rumors brought by Saxons who were no friends to Rome.

They met our galleys and warships, twenty to one, and sank them. They harried our coast, burning, marauding, pillaging, till hardly a roundship dared venture the crossing of the channel, and trade died. Communication with the continent was shut off. Even the fishing-vessels dared not leave the sight of land, and everywhere the Saxon dragon ships held the seas.

So, understand then that at the risk of boring you with an old tale, I must review the events following the recall of the legions, when in all Britain the only Roman soldiers were those of the sadly decimated Sixth Legion, Victrix, stationed at Eboracum and on the Wall.

If this be known to you, pass on. There

are things to follow that will be new, for I am the only Roman left alive in all the world who has knowledge of the marvels I shall describe.

First, after the Emperor Honorius' letter of recall, the Twentieth Legion embarked —leaving Deva and the west country exposed to the fierce mountain tribes of the Silures. Then from Ratæ, the Ninth marched away and all the low country was helpless.

Two years later, the Second Legion left Isca Silurum and nothing hindered the pirates from sailing up the broad Sabrina.

Lastly went the greater part of the Sixth, and too weak to hold the Wall, the Consul moved his forces farther south, deserting Eboracum to the Picts and Saxons, who promptly occupied it, settling there to stay.

If the various cities could have agreed among themselves, and together have assembled an army, Britain might yet be free. There were plenty of men with stout hearts and Roman training, and some of these the Sixth recruited to bring up the full strength of the legion, but this was like diluting wine with water.

The cities from which the levies came bickered among themselves, each trying to keep its fighting-men at home, and so, singly too weak to fight off invasion, they fell as they fought, singly. Meanwhile the various British princelings gathered a following and set up petty kingdoms, quite separately from the city-states, and most of these were later destroyed or absorbed by the invaders.

Eventually what remained of the Sixth, after three generations of fighting, recruiting and dilution, still calling itself Roman and Victrix as well, clinging to its eagles, retreated into the mountains of Damnonia, the last stronghold of Britain.

And here I must in more detail begin the story of my own particular family and tell how it was affected by these events.

STRANGER! Know me first. I am Ventidius Varro, then—Roman to the core of me, though I never have seen that lovely city by the Tiber, nor my father before me. He was British born, of a British mother, and on *his* father's side was possessed of only one quarter of pure Roman blood. Yet am I Roman, my allegiance is to Rome, and to her goes my love and my heart's yearning—to that delectable city which I shall now never see in life!

The story of my family is the tragedy of Britain. When my great-grandfather was called into the troops, my grandfather was a babe in arms. The island was bled white of fighting-men, only skeletons of garrisons remaining, but by the time of my grandfather's entrance into the Legion, firm sturdy substance had formed upon these bare bones of organization. One might say that the brains were still Roman, but all the flesh was British.

The Sixth fought the Picts, the Scoti and the Saxons, and although the barbarians had gained a foothold, they were all but dislodged again and were held with their backs to the sea. Then just as another year might have decided the struggle, Rome called.

Men were needed—Rome itself was in peril—my grandfather followed in his father's footsteps, into mystery, and never returned. None of the levies returned, and his wife, left lorn with young children, my father among them, moved west toward the mountains of Cambria and brought up her brood in Viriconium.

Rome sent us no more governors, no more high officials or low. Our fortresses in the west continued to be held by the decimated Sixth, but the very best men were gone, and I do not know where even their graves may lie.

Then the Jutes, Saxons and Angli, who had occasionally fought beside us as allies against the Picts, turned against us, and my

mother fled across the Cambrian border, looking over her shoulder at flaming Viriconium, where my father with other brave men fought and died that Rome might be perpetuated in Britain.

My early childhood was spent in wandering about among the wild Cymri, whose bravery had challenged and broken all the power that Rome could hurl against them, and which now remained the only corner of Britain which was free from the Saxon peril and which, strangely enough, now protected the culture of Rome. And at last I come to my own time and the story you must know.

Among these Cymri dwelt the strange man known to them as Myrdhinn, but to us across the border as Ambrosius; a man of noble aspect and terrifying eye, of flowing white beard and majestic carriage; a man whose very origin is shrouded in mystery.

If the tale is true, Myrdhinn was sired by a demon in the reign of King Vortigern, baptized instantly by Blayse, the mother's confessor, thus becoming a Christian, but retaining the demoniac powers of magic, insight and prophecy. Others have considered him so wise that he could not be even slightly mortal, and maintain that he was born at the age of eighty at a time co-existent with the construction of Earth and has since been growing wiser!

It is more probable, however, that he was a foundling brought up in childhood by Druids who still keep up their ancient practises in Cambria, and taught by them their mystical lore, though he in later life embraced Christianity. Druidism warred in his heart with Christian tenets.

It is well known that the sages of antiquity possessed knowledge lost to us in these times of decadence, and locked fast in Myrdhinn's brain were many secrets, including that of prolonged life.

I am beaten down by years, grizzled, gaunt and almost toothless, yet Myrdhinn in all the time of my acquaintance remained the same as that of my mother's description, when as a young woman she first saw him among the hills of Cambria, striding along a lonely glen, hale, rugged and strong, the child Arthur holding his hand and half trotting to keep up with the old man's vigorous pace.

They must then have been going to find his friend Antor, to whom Myrdhinn delivered Arthur for tuition, and whose diligent care developed the stripling into Arthur, the hoped-for, the undying—Arthur, Imperator, the great Pendragon, dictator—Arthur, only for treachery's intervention the savior of Britain.

AT THAT time he was about fifteen years older than I who, still a suckling, knew nothing of the stirring events around me. By the time I was growing calluses practising with sword and spear, Arthur already was leading forays into Saxon land.

Old crippled soldiers of the scattered legion remnants trained the savage youth of Cambria to a fantastic semblance of the iron ranks of Rome. Again the smiths pounded red iron into white blades, again sow and pig * talked on carroballista and catapult, and at last a ghost of the old Legion marched over the border, with tattered standards, battle-scarred armor, dinted shields.

But we marched in full strength! Our metal was bright and polished, our bows strong and arrows sharp (every man an archer, whether a member of the cavalry, engineers or simple legionary), and leading us all the glittering eagles gave us courage.

Sixth Legion, Victrix! Hail and farewell! Thy bones make the fields of Britain greener now.

Something of the old imperial spirit came back. Viriconium was captured, lost

* Ratchet and pawl.

and held again, and the Cymri streamed over the border, rebuilding all possible of the past glory. On the plain outside the walls scampered the shaggy Cambrian ponies in laughable contrast to the thundering charge of the Roman horse. But the Saxon footmen scattered before the charge, and as time went by we penetrated deeper into hostile country, winning back foot by foot the easily lost, but hardly won, beloved soil of Britain to be once again free land for us exiles and lovers of Rome.

Here and there we came upon noble steeds and mares in the fertile lowlands, and by the time Arthur's forces were strong enough to meet in pitched battle a superior force of Saxons, three hundred horsemen smashed the shield walls.

The Saxons, streaming away, left us masters of the field in the first great battle to break the invaders' power, and harrying the retreat the cataphracts pursued, hacking them down and wreaking such havoc that from the survivors of the troop Arthur formed his noble band of knights.

Their leather armor, knobbed with bronze, was replaced with plate; stronger horses were bred to carry the extra weight; and as Arthur came victor from field upon field, armies, chieftains, kings thronging to him, naming him amheradawr (or imperator)—the Round Table came into being and he held high court in Isca Silurum.

Thus from battle to battle we passed—our glory increasing, our confidence growing, recruits coming in—sneaking by night along hostile shores in coracles of hide and wicker, creeping by the moored Saxon longships—until flaming hilltop beacons, farther than the eye could see, marked the boundaries of recovered Britain.

Grumbling, growling to ourselves, watching the Legion grow to double strength, we waited for the word to sweep over the Saxon remnant. Then came unexpected help from Armorica—our compatriots across the sea sailing in roundships and galleys to our aid.

Myrdhinn had asked for their help, and nobly they answered.

At that time we had but one warship, the "Prydwen," a great dromon built as an experiment from a design found in an old book, modeled to be a cruiser which could meet and plow under the enemy galleys. Its like had not been seen in British waters for hundreds of years. Armed with ballistas and arrow engines, driven by oars and sails and with overhanging galleries the better to repel boarders, it towered over the hulking roundships and low galleys, like a proud cock who struts among his family, protector of all.

Already the barbarians were marching upon us, out of Wessex, while at sea a fleet sailed to land forces in our rear.

We met them at Mons Badonicus and spent the day and most of a long moonlight night in killing, while upon the water the allied fleet covered itself with glory.

Armorican, Hibernian and Saxon galleys crashed and flamed to heaven, while among them, ramming, casting firepots, roamed the "Prydwen" in the arrow-sleet, trampling the foe under her forefoot.

Then to us at last came peace, time to live and love and rest—and for some, time to plot treachery.

Myrdhinn had planned for Arthur a marriage with Gwenhyvar, daughter of a noble chieftain, Laodegan of Carmelide; and journeying thither in disguise to see the maid before wooing, Arthur arrived at an opportune time. The walled city of Carmelide was besieged by a wandering foray of savage mountain raiders, but Arthur's armored knights scattered them and drove them far.

ENTERING the city, Myrdhinn spoke for Arthur, beseeching the hand of Gwenhyvar as a reward to the city's savior.

It was open talk after, that Myrdhinn had engineered this attack and rescue to bring about his own plans, but I know nothing of the matter, being far away. I believe him capable of it, for his mind worked in devious ways and he was not a man to do a thing in a simple way if something spectacular would complicate it.

This time, however, if he was at bottom of the matter, his love for a brave show ruined himself, Arthur, Gwenhyvar—and Britain. You see, Gwenhyvar was already in love with a young man named Lanceloc.

Arthur was approaching middle age, Gwenhyvar and Lanceloc much younger. Theirs was the proper union, but how could an ambitious father refuse the great Pendragon, savior of the city? Laodegan commanded, Gwenhyvar obeyed like a dutiful child, and evil began.

"Forbidden fruit the sweetest of all"—so runs the ancient saw. Others knew what went on in all its seamy detail, but noble Arthur, the soul of bravery and honor, remained in ignorance for years.

Then Agrivain and Medrawd, kinsmen who aspired to be mighty themselves and who thought that could be best done by bringing low those already mighty, came sneaking, telling tales, spewing venom upon all that Arthur held dear, and down crashed our hopes for Britain.

Lanceloc, Agrivain and Medrawd fled into Wessex, fleeing their outraged ruler, taking their kinsmen, their vassals, and their friends.

Here they allied themselves with what remained of Saxon power, sending word overseas that it was safe again for pirates to come and murder, rape and pillage, for Arthur was stricken to the heart and Rome had forgotten her lost colony.

So the Sixth marched and the Saxons marched, and both great armies came toward the fatal field of Camlan—and the end of all glory!

2. Arthur, Myrdhinn—and Vivienne

IT IS not for me to describe that tragic calamity to my Emperor, feeling certain that during the passage of these many years, the sad events of that cursed day have been so described to you, that by now you must have a clearer picture of the battle than any I could give. After all, I was but a centurion, nor had I any knowledge of the whole plan of battle. Still, all plans were frustrated by a thick cold fog that shrouded us from the beginning; so that soon we broke up into troops hunting for similar small enemy bands, killing and being killed in many bitter encounters.

Then as the daylight grew more dim, the clash of arms became feebler, and wandering alone, separated from my century, I dismounted from a charger I had previously found running masterless through the slaughter, and now led him along a beach where the waves of an ebbing tide came slowly in, whispering a mournful requiem to all my hopes. The clammy, darkening fog seemed pressing down upon my very soul.

The narrow strand separated the ocean-sea from a small brackish lake at which I meant to water my steed. So I turned to my left, hearing the plash of little waves among the sedges of the salty marsh surrounding the fresher water. There was no other sound, save the occasional croak of a sea bird flying blindly through the mist.

My horse was raising his head from his drink, with a long sigh, when the fog abruptly lifted and gave me a clear view of perhaps a hundred yards. We were standing at the edge of a narrow inlet and upon its other shore I saw the wreckage of a furious encounter.

Dead men lay in the water and carpeted the sand beyond as far as I could see into the farther haze. But not all there were corpses.

One lay bleeding, partly raised upon an elbow, while bending over him was a ghastly knight. Much of their armor was hacked away and that remaining was dabbled with blood. I recognized the pair.

The dying man was Arthur, the other with whom he weakly argued was Sir Bedwyr, one of the most trusted of his knights. I hailed them, but Arthur was too far gone or too absorbed to hear me, though Sir Bedwyr looked across the water and lifted his hand for silence.

Again Arthur commanded and this time Sir Bedwyr agreed, picked up Arthur's great sword, Caliburn, and walked away into the mist. Then the cold gray curtain fell again, and through it I rode around the inlet until the sound of voices halted me.

"This time you did not fail me?" queried Arthur.

"Regretfully I obeyed, my King."

"And what did you see and hear?"

"I threw the sword into the mere, as you commanded, and as it circled flashing, something cried out most dolefully, while up from the mere there raised a long arm in a flowing sleeve of white samite. Caliburn was caught, brandished thrice and drawn under, while from all the mere rose up a various keening of sorrowful voices."

"So Caliburn returns to the hand that gave it, to be held in trust for another who shall succor Britain. Strange that I heard no sound."

"Sadly I say it, my King, but your ears are becoming attuned to other rhythms than those of earth."

"So soon? With my work barely begun?"

With that exclamation his eyes closed. As I approached, I could not tell if Death had touched him or if it was but a swoon.

SIR BEDWYR met me before I reached Arthur, and explained, whispering, the scene I had just witnessed.

"He seems out of his head with despair. His wounds are grievous, but I think not fatal could I only stop the bleeding. I think it is his soul that is dying. He is firmly convinced that the end is come, for himself, for all of us, and for Britain. That is why he bade me cast his great sword into the mere.

"God forgive me! I am a forsworn knight! I have lied to a dying man. You can understand, Centurion? How could I cast it away? The brand has become a symbol to men. With Arthur gone, the scraps of our army will rally only to something they cherish. You know how the rabble need something to follow, a hero, an eagle, a sacred relic. With something to protect or follow they are giants; without it they are only men, afraid of death, afraid of pain. They would fight like demons to keep Arthur's sword out of the hands of the Saxons."

I had dropped upon my knees, examining the deep wounds in side and thigh, but my efforts at stanching were no better than the other's had been, and we worked together, while he continued:

"So I cast the jeweled scabbard into the mere and lied! There was no arm in white samite, no wailing, only ripples on the mere and a sea bird's croak!"

"Nor would there have been more had you hurled the sword after the scabbard," I grunted. "Hand me more of that linen shirt."

He smiled sadly.

"Now if he dies, he will die happy in that respect, thinking I obeyed him, and if he lives he will understand I meant it for the best and will forgive me, I hope. Do you think I was right?"

"Unquestionably," I agreed. "With Arthur's sword in our hands we can flee to the hills, gather strength and strike again. If I could only stop this cursed blood!"

His lips had become the color of clay and I marveled that he still breathed, for

it seemed that each faint gasp would be his last.

Hearing the approach of a company, I looked up and clutched my own sword, then relaxed. Robed men, sagely bearded, were about me. Myrdhinn and his Nine Bards had come, and never had I been so glad to see that mysterious person as now.

He wasted no words, but brushing us both away, deftly probed the wounds, pressed at the base of the skull and at two places upon Arthur's back, then motioned for us to stand guard.

"The great Pendragon is departing."

The bards began a sorrowful keening, cut short by the sage.

"Peace! That will not help us. I cannot cure him. Time only can do that, but I can prevent a further sinking while we seek safety."

The groping tendrils of fog swirled thicker about us all as we watched those nimble fingers. Deftly he bound up those dreadful wounds from which the blood no longer pumped, his lips moving in a swift patter of mumbled words. Here was a scrap of Latin or a Cymric phrase, but mostly it was merely a sibilant hissing which belonged to no language of our ken.

And it seemed to us that in the pauses between the longer incantations, the mist became thicker and thicker yet, while just beyond the circle of our vision there sounded muttered rejoinders, as though Myrdhinn prayed for the life of Arthur and the cold lips of that great host of British dead on Camlan field must supply the responses.

And ever through the mist came the lapping of water on the distant shore. But *was* it distant? The sound seemed closer than it had been.

Once Myrdhinn paused to listen, but went on to complete his charm.

A cold touch lapped my ankles. I was in a puddle of lake water without having realized the fact. I moved closer to the mound upon which the others stood.

"Is he dead?" gasped Sir Bedwyr, and Myrdhinn shook his head.

"He would have been by now, but his breathing has stopped and he will live."

"Stopped his breathing? Then he must die!"

"Not entirely stopped, perhaps," smiled Myrdhinn. "He will breathe possibly once a day, until he has recovered during a long sleep the energy and the blood he has lost. He has been almost drained dry. We will take him to a safe and secret place where I can hide him away until he is recovered and ready to fight again for Britain."

I moved out of the water again. Was I sinking in a marsh? The ground seemed solid.

"How long must he sleep?" Again Sir Bedwyr questioned.

"Longer than you would believe. *Your* bones will be mold and your very tomb forgotten, before Arthur has well begun to sleep! I cannot explain now—hear that clank of arms? Enemies are prowling in the mist! Quick, Varro, help my men to lift him across your saddle. We must flee!"

As I moved to obey, I saw again that I stepped from water to reach higher ground. I looked about me. Unperceived by us, the water of the mere was stealthily rising to surround and cut us off.

QUIETLY I showed Myrdhinn. His eyes widened. Then he laughed.

"Ah, Bedwyr. It would have been better had you returned Caliburn to the lady who loaned it. My wife, Vivienne, a somewhat grasping person. She may bear us a grudge for cheating her. She held me ensorceled in the wood of Broceliande, for some time, I remember very vividly. Come quickly, before the water rises!"

A huge wave came up from the mere and hurled itself along the inlet, swirled

about our knees and fell back as though loath to release us.

"Hurry! Hurry!" urged Myrdhinn.

Again we heard the clinking of accouterments, this time much closer, and soon the gruff words of Saxons could be distinguished.

They were hard upon us. Sir Bedwyr looked at me, and I at him. We were the only armed men in the party. With common consent we turned back, but for only a few steps when we again heard the rumble of a monstrous wave breaking upon the lowland we were leaving.

This time other sounds followed—cries of horror, of pain; the screams of tortured men; then groans, and bitter sobbing, awfully intermingled with mumbling, munching sounds, as though in the fog mercifully hidden from us some monstrous thing was feeding.

We stood aghast as Myrdhinn urged us to join the party.

"Come quickly! Tarry not! The mistake will soon be discovered. Let us get far from this evil place."

"What is back there?" I gasped.

"Vivienne's pet, the Avanc. The Worm of the Mere. We have cheated it and her as well. She is probably jealous that I have aided Arthur and she is surely enraged at the loss of Caliburn, which was due her by the terms of the loan.

"Listen, my good wife, and heed!" He called into the fog. "I hold Arthur's sword, and shall now keep it. This to repay for my years of imprisonment in the Ring of Smoky Air.

"Run, for your lives, men, run!"

We ran, beside the trotting horse. For the first few minutes all was still; then the ground surged in waves beneath us like an angry sea. Once, twice, thrice it rolled and threw us from our feet. We picked ourselves up and ran blindly in the fog.

Then somewhere a crash, as though the ocean-sea was hurling itself violently upon the bloody shore, and a long silence, followed by a second mighty roar of waves now mercifully far away. Silence again.

In the fog, just outside our vision, a woman laughed. Long, low and inexpressibly evil! Musically lovely, but oh, so wicked!

Just a laugh, nothing more, but in it was hinted the knowledge of something that we could not then know or guess; something that we should and must know, but which was withheld from us.

We looked at Myrdhinn. He shook his head without speaking.

Something had been done by the Lady of the Lake, to repay insults, to avenge Lanceloc (said to be her kin) and to injure us all, but what it was we did not know.

We went our way again, deeper and deeper inland, on into the fog. And behind us, till we had gone so far we could not hear it, rippled that lovely musical laughter, chilling the blood in our veins.

3. The Sleeper and the Seer

THERE is no need, my Emperor, to weary you with dry details of all we said and thought and did during the next few days. It is not for that reason I am writing. Briefly then, we marched for several nights, through hostile country, picking up stragglers as we went, and hiding until we numbered forty men and could march by day.

Twice we fought wandering bands of Saxons as we pressed on westward toward Arthur's homeland of Lyonesse, for he had often expressed a wish to be buried in his natal village of Avalon. But as we neared it, we met wild-eyed refugees, fleeing a more dire peril than the sea raiders—the seat itself! For, we learned, on the very eve of that fatal field of Camlan, the fertile and populous province of Lyonesse had sunk beneath the sea!

Yea, sixty villages and towns, each with its church and wealth and people, among them Arthur's own Avalon, lay drowned and nothing remained to mark the spot but a few scattered hilltops, now islands in a sea of yellow muddy waters.

"Vivienne, think you?" I asked Myrdhinn.

He nodded without speaking, but his nine bards, in tones as solemn as a peal of drowned bells, answered, "Aye."

We hurried on through a thick wood and came to a shallow place where the ebbing tide had filled the underbrush with mud, corpses, bodies of horses and cattle, fish with their bellies burst open by the underwater explosions which had accompanied the sinking of the land.

Myrdhinn leading to a goal he had decided upon, we followed: first, the nine bards; then myself and the charger which bore Arthur's body, very yellow and unbreathing, though warm and flexible; then, the legionaries, who accepted me as centurion, though only two were from my century, and most of the others were unknown to me.

We passed through the wood and arrived at a great hoar rock, almost a mountain, and up this we climbed and rested. For a long time we looked out over the drowned land murdered by sorcery and spite, watching the tide come in and cut us off from the mainland, while Myrdhinn sat apart, considering the future.

Then, on the ebbing of the tide, we returned to the wood and left the seer alone with the sleeper. We made camp beyond the deathly wood and waited—three days.

During all that time a thick black cloud, neither fog nor smoke, hung about the summit of the mount, unmoving in the fiercest wind, and those among us with sharp ears claimed to hear mutterings in an unknown language, issuing from the cloud. Likewise, it seemed, they heard various invisible hurrying creatures passing through the air above, speeding toward the mount, conversing as they came.

For myself, I heard none of this, and it was very likely but the stirring of volcanic activity still busy near the sunken province.

FINALLY Myrdhinn came to us, and the cloud disappeared as had Arthur and the glory and honor of his reign. Where he had been laid with Caliburn, his famed sword, fast in his grip, Myrdhinn would not say, except that he was in a secure spot not to be found by man until the time was come for the waking of him.

Be not concerned for Britain's champion, oh my Emperor, for I have the sure word of Myrdhinn the wise, that Arthur shall one day wake! There will be a mighty war in which all the tribes shall engage which possess the tiniest drop of British blood. Then Arthur will wake, make himself known and with Caliburn carry carnage into the lands of Britain's enemies. And war shall be no more and peace shall reign for ever over all of Earth!

This, Myrdhinn told us. He told us also, that he had writ this in enduring letters of Cymric, Ogham and Latin, about the walls of Arthur's abode, sealing the entrance thereto with a rock cunningly fixed and inscribed:

"HERE ARTHUR LIES. KING ONCE AND KING TO BE."

Lest, Emperor (if Britain has by now been reclaimed by Roman legions), they should be tempted to search for and enter this secret place, be warned. Myrdhinn has set watchers there. Arthur cannot and must not be awakened before the appointed time. The watchers will see to that. They are not human, they will not sleep or rest, they do not eat or drink, tire or forget or die! They are there to keep the entrance inviolate. Be warned! They are dangerous and will wait as Myrdhinn commanded,

till Arthur wakes, be it one or three thousands of years. I do not know, nor does it concern us. They are there, the Guardians—the Watchers!

The next morning, again we marched, following the coastline westward, and after some time we reached the very end of land where beyond lay nothing but the boundless ocean. Here on the brink of a high raw cliff stood a monstrous boulder so cleverly poised that the touch of a hand might rock it, but many oxen could not pull it from its place, though bar and pry might dislodge it.

Myrdhinn drew from his robes a bronze plate already prepared and inscribed with an account of what we had done, instructions for entering Arthur's chamber and a warning to the unwary.

Again we left him alone, again we saw the black cloud gather and from a distance saw a marvel hard to explain. The massive and ponderous boulder rose in air to the height of a tall man!

This work, which would have taxed the powers of a Titan, was done noiselessly and with apparent ease. Myrdhinn merely touched it, so far as we could judge, and it rose.

He stooped, put the plate beneath it, and the rocking stone descended upon it, holding it safe there until such time as Myrdhinn described, upon joining us:

"When the moment is come for Arthur's awaking, the earth will shake, the rocking stone will topple down the cliff and Lyonesse will rise from the sea. Then, according to my vision, men will find my hidden words, will read, understand and obey. Then, when the drowned lands are fertile enough so that apple blossoms blow again in Avalon, in apple blossom time, men will enter his sleeping-chamber, waking him without fear of the watchers, and the era of peace on earth will begin."

You, my Emperor, may think this fantastic, but had you heard the words of the ancient, you could not have doubted. It may occur to you that Myrdhinn was a sorcerer, and it is true that at times he did use sorcery, as will be shown, but he dreaded it mightily. His Christian beliefs warred with his Druidic learning and he had the feeling that he was risking hellfire by the use of Black Magic.

He was an heir to all the lost lore of the ancients, and much of his sorcery was marvelous tricks with quite natural explanations, but the basic facts which made them possible were hidden from the rabble. The world is hoary with years and has forgotten much.

NOW, our mission accomplished, we must needs look to our own welfare and so held a council to decide our future, and found that we were of several minds.

Some were for striking deep into the hills and gathering other fugitives about us until we were able to strike again for freedom. Sir Bedwyr proposed this plan and many agreed with him, but I disputed, it seeming wiser to take ship and sail across to Armorica, where we might find kinsmen who would see us on the road to Rome.

Here, I suggested, a punitive expedition might be sent as had been once before from Gaul. Surely, I argued, Britain was too valuable a part of the Empire to be lost—and then Myrdhinn ended the bickering.

"You, Sir Bedwyr, and you, Centurion, think of nothing but the regaining of Britain, but believe me when I tell you this is not possible. The Empire itself is dying; the seat of power is shifting eastward. Britain has been lost for a generation and its only hope of Romano-British domination died when treachery and intrigue brought us to Camlan field. Gaul is going down the same road and soon will be lost for ever to Rome.

"Britain belongs now to the strongest

and will be dismembered among them. It is for us to flee, not to Rome, whose power is waning, but to another land of which the ancients tell.

"Suppose now, that there was a land, beyond the western ocean, so far away that it is unknown to the Jutes and Angles, the Saxons and the Norse—known to Rome long ago, but forgotten by all except scholars. Would it not be worth visiting, exploring, conquering perhaps, to furnish for us poor exiles a new home, a new domain into which Rome might send fleets and colonies should the barbarians press too hard? I am certain that there is such a land.

"Firstly, it is said that King Solomon of the Jews obtained precious metals from its mines, brought hence by the men of Tyre. Homer, of the Greeks, speaks of a westerly land beyond the seas, locating as does Pliny, the Western Ethiopians in this land. Plato tells us of a sunken continent named Atlantis, but this is not the same, for Anaxagoras also tells of a great division of the world beyond this ocean, dry and unsubmerged.

"The historian Theopompus tells us of the Meropians and their continent beyond the western ocean, larger, he says, than all our known world, and Aristotle says that the Carthaginian explorers discovered and settled a part of the southern country, until their Senate decreed that no one should voyage thither, killing all the settlers, lest it no longer remain a secret; for the Carthaginians wished this country to be kept as a refuge for themselves if ever a disaster befell their republic, but lost their shipping in the Punic Wars.

"Statius Sebosius calls this land 'the two Hesperides' and tells us that forty-two days' sailing will bring us there. Could you ask for better proof than all of this?"

"Ridiculous!" snorted Sir Bedwyr. "There is not a vessel in Britain that could be equipped for such a voyage! Far better to recruit, build up strength and have at the Saxons again."

"You are forgetting the 'Prydwen.' Arthur's own dromon lies safe at Isca Silurum, if the Saxon dragon-ships have not raided and burned the city. If we find her whole, will you sail with us?"

"Not I," quoth he, stoutly. "I live and die in Britain. What! Should I venture to sea in a ship so weighted down with metal that a puff of breeze might founder her? Let steel kill me, not tin!"

Here he spoke of a novelty, which the Cornish tin miners had conceived. They had sent great stores of this metal, without cost, to Arthur for embellishment of his ship, and the Imperator had sheathed the "Prydwen" with it, from stem to stern, above and below water, knowing it to be protection against fireballs above and barnacles below. This made the "Prydwen" glitter so handsomely that many called her "The House of Glass."

"Your fears are unfounded. I feel it in my prophetic soul, that I and all who sail with me shall see this land which may indeed prove to be the Isles of the Blest of which you have all heard at your mother's knee. Why not? The wise geographer, Strabo, believed in it. Shall we consider him a romancer? It may indeed be that the Meropians have already sailed eastward and discovered Europe; for Cornelius Nepos, the eminent historian, says that when Q. Metellus Celer was proconsul in Gaul, in 63 B.C., certain peculiar strangers were sent to him as a gift from the King of the Batavi. They said that they had been driven from their own land, *eastward* over the oceans until they had landed on the coast of Belgica.

"This may have inspired Seneca, one hundred and thirteen years thereafter, to prophesy in his tragedy of Medea, as follows:

" 'In later years an age shall come, when the ocean shall relax its bonds, a great con-

tinent shall be laid open and new lands revealed. Then Thule shall not be the remotest land known on the earth.'

"Four hundred and fifty years have elapsed since that prediction. If we sail and discover, we cannot now call ourselves the first, because we shall but follow in the footsteps of others who have traveled in less stout vessels than ours.

"FISHERS from Armorica, our own kinsfolk, have visited its northern fishing-grounds yearly, in their ridiculous craft, while Mældune of Hibernia, with seventeen followers, less than a hundred years ago, was blown to sea in flimsy skin curracks, and claimed to have reached a large island where grew marvelous nuts with insides white as snow.

"So you see there are such lands and they can be reached! Moreover, in our own times, Brandon, the monk of Kerry, the same one who recently established the monastery at Clonfert, has been there not once only, but twice! He had no great warship, such as we, but a merchant vessel with strong hides nailed over it, pitched at the seams, and it took him and his people forty days (almost exactly as related by Statius Sebosius) to reach this mysterious country.

"Now who among you will come with me and call yourselves men?"

"There is nothing here for us but a choice between death or slavery and degradation. I say let us all go and find this paradise on earth, this land of Tir-nan-og, this country of Hy Bresail, these Fortunate and Blessed Isles!"

Thus I, carried away with enthusiasm.

Then, indeed, began much arguing pro and con, which in the end resolved itself into a division of our force. Many, fearing monsters of the deep, demons and other fantasies, elected to remain, and choosing Sir Bedwyr as their leader, they marched off toward the wild mountains, and whether they died before they reached the safety of the hills or lived henceforward a life of skulking outlawry, I know not.

At a little port we bought skin curachs, and hugging shore, passed through the muddy waters, left them for cleaner, and in the end we reached Isca Silurum, without seeing a Saxon sail. And mightily glad we were to see the glitter of the "Prydwen's" sides and the golden glint of Isca's guardian genius, high upon its pillar, for these things told us that we were sailing into a free and friendly province.

So we found it, a little section of free land, bounded by the four cities of Aquæ Sulis, Corinium, Glevum and Gobannium —a little island of freedom in a barbarian sea, and we in its one safe port of Isca were loath to leave it for the dreaded Sea of Darkness.

Yet a month later we left it. One hundred fighting-men, besides a full complement of sailors, and thirty Saxons whose strong backs we thought would be useful when winds could not be found. These were prisoners doomed to execution, and we took them to make up a lack of rowers. Better for us if we had let them die by the ax!

So we turned our backs on Britain, never, any of us, to see it more.

4. A Little Ship—and a Great Sea

NOW, it is not my concern to make a tedious account of our sea voyage, but a few items of importance must be told for your guidance.

When your fleet of conquest and discovery sails, lay in great store of provisions, for this sea is vast.

Once out of sight of land, let your shipmen sail into the face of the setting sun; they will find the land that is waiting for your rule.

If driven out of their course by storms, having sailed thus west for forty days or thereabouts, sail north or south along the

coast of this land which the people here call Alata, and they will find a broad gulf, as we found it, into which empties a mighty river.

Let them search for this river, for there at its mouth lies a fortified town and in it wait guides who will conduct your men to my capital city.

Carry much water. It is life itself, for this sea is so vast that we tossed upon it near two months, and had we not had many rainy days we could not have lived, though four times we found islands and filled our casks, pails, pans, even our drinking-cups before leaving those hospitable shores for our westward journey.

Yet there was no bickering aboard ship, among us Romano-British, although on the tenth day at sea we learned the mettle of our slaves.

At first we had filled the port oar-bank with Saxons, thinking that rowing as a unit against a unit of free men on the opposite bank might breed within them a spirit of competition and bring about a better understanding. Enemies though they were, we respected them as doughty fighters and hoped to use their strong backs to advantage. But they sulked and would not work well, lagging in the stroke and causing trouble in many ways.

Then we separated them, fifteen to a side, and a free man between each two of them. This system, with use of the whip, worked better. There was no more lagging, and sulk as they might, the "Prydwen" plowed on through fair and foul weather alike, sometimes with sail and sometimes with oar-play, but questing westward with a lookout always at the masthead; for at that time not even Myrdhinn was certain how far we might have to seek for sight of land.

Before the dawn of this tenth day, these despairing homesick Saxons struck in the only way left open to them, preferring death to continued slavery.

I was roused from sleep by a yell, and my door crashed open. In bounced Marcus, my sister's son, with a cry of "Fire!" which brought me up standing. Unarmed, I rushed out in my night-gear.

Below decks, the planking beneath the oar benches was blazing, spreading fast along the inner sides, crisping the leathers over the oar-holes and flaring to high heaven, painting the sail scarlet.

It was more than one fire—it was many —started simultaneously, but running together so rapidly that we could hear the flames roar. A bucket brigade was forming, and as I looked the first water fell, but I had no eyes for that.

There was a greater sight, a thing so brave in its hopeless despair and determination, I cannot describe it with justice. Midway down the port bank sat three men already lapped in fire!

Two had already breathed flames and were dead or dying, for their heads had dropped on their breasts and their long hair was burning. The third saw me staring, laughed wildly in his torment and triumph and beat his breast with a charred and blistered hand.

Then he began to sing! I shall never forget the sight, the smell of burning flesh, the crackle of rushing flames and that fierce terrible song:

"Cattle die, kings die,
Kindred die, we also die;
One thing never dies:
The fair fame of the valiant!"

His eyes closed, I thought him spent, and then he raised his face upward—and cried (a glad call, inspiring as a trumpet blast!):

"Courage, comrades, let us go to Woden like men!"

And he rolled from his bench into the flames, stone dead.

Gods! How they fought us as we tried to quench the fire they had set, by saving

through the days the oil issued in their rations, letting it soak into the planking, and when all was ready, igniting it with live coals from a cresset handy to one in his chains, they passing the coals from hand to hand till all were supplied.

More than one of us bore marks of their manacles as they sought to hinder us until we all should burn together; but in the end, those living were herded aft under guard, not all walking there, being borne by those comrades who had not been clubbed into insensibility.

YOU may well suppose that after the fire was out, we were all in savage mood and with little inclination to be lenient to the rebels.

"Overboard with them!" was the main cry, as the men crowded round. Then Myrdhinn came forward.

"I have something to say to you all," he mildly interrupted. "Saxons, is your chief dead?"

"I, Wulfgar Ironbelly, am King, and alive," growled a flaxen-bearded giant, thrusting to the edge of his group.

"And I, his brother Guthlac, am alive," echoed one who might have been his twin, closely following. "Speak to us both, Gaffer, and we will harken."

"First," Myrdhinn began, "I am responsible for this expedition. I know my limitations, and having no experience upon the sea, I have not interfered with affairs pertaining to ship life and operations. However, I have no intention that men brave enough to seek liberty through painful death and courageous enough to watch their kinsmen suffer in quiet and watch in quiet the fire creeping to envelop themselves, shall now die a useless death, depriving this ship of near a score and a half of such doughty spirits. Saxons, ye are free men!"

An uneasy murmur rippled through the crowd. Was Myrdhinn mad?

The Saxons looked at each other, unbelieving. Had they heard aright?

"You are free," Myrdhinn repeated, "on conditions. We obviously cannot put back at this stage of the journey, the purpose of which may have escaped you. We are engaged in a journey to the world's edge in search of new lands of which we have tidings. We do not know what we may find there or if we shall ever return. Knowing that behind us lies only ruin, war's desolation, and an unhappy future, we go west, where our faith has placed the Land of the Blessed. Possibly we may find it. Very likely, we shall not.

"Saxons, I ask you to fight beside us, to chance the decrees of Fortune with us, to accept hunger, thirst, the perils of a strange land, for the joy of discovery and adventure. In short, I would sail with you all as brothers. Saxons! Is it yea or nay?"

They talked among themselves in low voices. Then Guthlac struck hands with his brother and their eyes gleamed through the soot.

"What a tale we shall bring home with us, Wulfgar!"

"Count on us as free men under your conditions, Wealas!"

The gathering broke up and I followed Myrdhinn to his cabin.

"In God's name, are you mad? Can't you see, if we do discover anything, the news will reach the Saxons too? Those pirates will follow to ravage any settlements that Rome may make!"

Myrdhinn shook his head. "Do not concern yourself about trifles, Varro. Not one of those men will ever see his homeland. They are doomed men already."

I stared at him. Sometimes Myrdhinn terrified me.

"Just how much do you know? How about us? Will *we* succeed?"

"I know more than you think and less than I wish. I can foresee much, but not all—or enough. There are blanks in the

future which are closed to me, as much as to other men, and nothing I could tell you would be enough, or what you should know, the future being mutable and subject to change. But do not worry about Saxon pirates ravaging Roman towns in Brandon Land, for that they will never do."

I believed him then, and now I know that what he said was true.

Well, we fought on, beating our way into storms and out of them, storms so tremendous that we took in seas over the bulwarks and learned what it was to struggle without ceasing, through a world all water, with a ship that would scarcely obey the helmsman, so sluggishly she rolled. We knew the worry of broken oars, of riven sails, of a crew more dead than alive from loss of sleep and the battering of the waves, but bailing like fiends to keep the water down so that the next great water mountain might not in its falling finish the work entirely and send us all to Neptune.

But Myrdhinn kept us courageous and still believing in him; when it seemed as though we were to sail till our beards were gray, we kept on striving to cross this mighty River of Ocean, though beginning to despair of ever reaching its farther bank.

FINALLY the winds ceased blowing and not even a tiny swell rippled the surface, so it was "out oars and row," which we did for a weary week, and nobody became disheartened; for Myrdhinn told us that Brandon had come to this place and passed through it without harm, though hindered by floating weed. So we knew ourselves to be in the proper track and took this for a good omen, till fog came down and for three days we saw neither sun nor star to guide us, and our shipman was like to go out of his mind with worry and fret about it.

So Myrdhinn looked into his private stores and brought up a little hollow iron fish, which he placed with care in a bucket of water, treating it as a very precious thing.

At once, it turned itself about, pointing with its nose to the south and marking the north with its tail, so intelligently that almost our shipman was afraid to look at it, not having much trust in Myrdhinn's good intentions, and, I think, disbelieving in any other lands save those he knew.

"Remark, worthy voyager," said Myrdhinn, "how the side fins point out the points of west and east, and be guided by them. And guard this little fish that it be not lost, for I prize it far more than its actual value would indicate, it having been given to me by a yellow-skinned wanderer who by its aid had guided himself across the broad plains of Scythia, to the island of Samothrace where we met.

"Also, fear not the days to come, since Brandon has written that beyond this Sea of Calms lies a fair island inhabited by a wise people, and among them we may expect to find shelter."

We rowed, the sun and stars returned, our food gave out entirely; we drank our bellies full and rowed again, stayed by that thin cheer, until one day the winds came and bore us on, and all of us fell on our knees and thanked our various gods (Christian and Pagan together); for there were now but very few still strong enough to move an oar.

I repeat, bring large stores of food, lest your men be in the state we now found ourselves, debating whether or no one of us poor hungry folk should die that the rest might eat. Myrdhinn saved us from that sin. In this broad watery desert he found us food!

I might mention here that in all our long journey we saw none of the sea monsters of which fables have so much to tell,

though we did see strange sights that filled us with dread.

One night our lookout came below, squealing and white with fear, crying out that the sea was blazing and we were lost. Hurrying to look, we were startled to find that all around us the water was glowing and shimmering with light. But it was not fire, my Emperor, and it was harmless, though I cannot explain the mystery.

One must expect odd things if one travels. Not everything strange is dangerous, and who but cowards would hold back from great adventure because of odd, unexplainable events?

We took it for a portent, but it was not —unless indeed it foretold good, for no evil happened us. Fear not this trivial oddity, native to these seas, but boldly disregard it when found, and press onward. *We* passed from it unscathed.

We saw dolphins and mightier fish also, but none so huge as the unbelievable fish Jasconye, which Brandon describes as being the hugest fish in all the world, and writes that upon its back he and all his men celebrated the Feast of the Resurrection, not knowing but that they stood upon an island, until they lit fire to cook some victual, and their island sunk and left them all swimming!

This I take to be a tale for children. Disregard it. We saw none so huge, though we were companied for some distance by a convoy of very large creatures who sported around us, watching us while they sent high spurts of water and froth into the air from their nostrils as they breathed. They harmed us not, being curious only, though by their very size and weight they might prove dangerous if maddened. Be warned in *this* matter!

After this we met another kind of fish, very evilly disposed toward man, and we learned about it as follows:

Kinial'ch, one of our bravest, though without any Roman blood, being purely Cymric, had been wounded severely in our affray with the rebels. While we had food he lived and languished, becoming no better and in fact failing slightly each day, until in the end when our rations grew scanty and coarse, he died.

WE BURIED him in the only way we could. His Cymric comrades keened over him, gashing themselves with their knives. Myrdhinn prepared him for burial, marking his winding-sheet not only with a Christian cross, but also with a sickle which he painted upon the cloth in gold, while beside it he pinned a scrap of mistletoe, these things being symbols of the old Druidic faith never yet completely destroyed in the dark fastnesses of the Cambrian hills.

So prepared for any future, we slid the body over the side, and witnessed a horrid sight. Scarce had it touched the water when a fierce fish seized upon it in a welter of foam, and fought for the fragments with other of its kin which instantly appeared.

We slew several with javelin casts, but finding these victims were speedily set upon, we ceased, for others smelling the blood in the water came and followed us. They kept in our wake for days, until, as I have written, we were dying for want of food. Then Myrdhinn came to our help.

We had tried to kill one of these fish before, for food, but when wounded, each was rent apart by its companions. Now, Myrdhinn bade us try again, saying that this time we would not fail.

He formed a length of rope into a circle, coated it with greenish paste from a small pot, gave three of us heavy mittens and warned us not to touch the rope with our bodies. Then, telling us what to do, he dangled his foot overside and pretended to slip.

As one of the man-eaters came to the

surface we flung the rope around him. When it struck the water, the surface bubbled and fumed, hissing as though touched by hot iron. The fish flung itself about in a frenzy, but could no more escape than from a stone wall built about it. Then it stiffened out and lay belly upward, rocking in the enclosed space, while its kindred nosed about outside.

Before they could break in, though the rope was now sinking, we had hooks in the carcass and dragged it in, and it was not long before we were dining upon tasty steaks. So we escaped from the Sea of Calms, and feeding thriftily upon our fish-meat (for Myrdhinn warned us this feat was not magic and could not be repeated) we sailed on.

The skin of this great man-eating fish was hard to cut, and Guthlac spoke for it, shaping the thickest part, while moist, into a breast-plate. This he studded with the bosses from an old worn-out piece of armor we found for him, and took also the buckles and straps.

With more of the hide, he covered a wooden buckler, and with small pieces made scabbards for sword and seaxe, binding also his ax-haft with narrow strips; so when this hide dried and shrank tight in the sun, Guthlac was possessor of as fine equipment as any on board.

And indeed, many of us were envious of him, for this thick, knobby hide proved to be nigh as tough as metal, though we could not then foresee the dire result of this day's work of his, which was to bring sorrow to me in later years.

5. *Brandon's Isle*

CLOSE to a week later, a violent wind in company with thunder and lightning and hissing sheets of rain overtook us, and until dark and after we raced along in its grip. But it passed us before dawn, and as we lay rocking in the following swell, many miles from where the storm had found us, we in some curiosity peered ahead in the half-light of early morning, aided by far lightning flashes.

Every man of us knew a strange feeling, a sensation of an event about to occur, something pleasant or horrid, we could not tell which; but something which sent before it a warning of its coming.

Then the wind shifted, blowing toward us, and plainly was wafted the sweet hot smell of lush, rotting vegetation, so we knew then and one whispered to another, "Land! Land!" and the other, "What land, mate?" for Brandon told of many isles, some with friendly folk and some where dwelt enchanters to be feared, and some where worshipful priests dwelt, solitarily praising God, and clothed only in a weave of their long gray hair.

But, even as we whispered among us, a river of fire poured down the sky with a sound as though Heaven's floor was split wide open, and the lookout in the maintop raised his hands in the glare, crying "Brandon's Isle!" in a wild exulting shout, and again all was dark and we groped as though struck blind.

In that instant we knew that the Scot adventurer's tale was true, at least in part, for the little isles with the enchanters, either friendly or inimical, were all tiny and low in the sea, but this which reared itself before us was mighty land indeed, high and rugged, nor could we tell then in that brief flash if it be island or no.

And I may well say here that I think the stories of enchanters were creations of fancy, inserted into a description of travel too dry otherwise to appeal to Brandon's legend-loving folk.

So disregard anything you may be told in Hibernia or Britain, of sorcery in these western seas. Vanishing isles there may be, but *we* saw them not; the folk are simple and friendly and the fruit of the isles is good and nourishing, like blood of

life itself to hungry mariners, salted to a very pickle, as we were that night.

At this time, not knowing what lay before us, we took soundings, dropped anchor and waited for dawn, all very quietly after that first burst of joy, that we might see what was to be seen before our presence near this strange land was suspected by its dwellers.

As we lay there, slowly rocking on the long swells, listening to the low murmur of the surf upon that darkness-hidden strand, the sky slowly reddening above us, the smell of wood burning came over the water on the seaward-trending breeze; and this, increasing, told us more plainly than any words could, that the land was peopled.

We stacked javelins and arrows in their places, saw to our bow-strings, cranked back the arrow engines, brought down the short wicked arms of the two tormentæ and loaded each with a jagged rock from the ballast; all this in quiet so far as possible and we thought unheard, until the light suddenly strengthening, we saw that strand and upon it the figure of a man peering out to sea, brought there perchance by the strange sounds of creaking cordage or of ratchet and pawl clinking as we cranked one or another of the engines.

That he saw us we could not doubt, for at this moment the red rim of the sun burst up out of the sea and flooded us and him with light. A breathless moment we stared at him and he at us over the intervening rollers, until I hailed him, throwing my sword arm high with empty hand and outflung palm to show we came as friends.

Then, startled, he fled inland among the thick growth of trees and bushes, shouting as he went, and presently returned with a company of men bearing spears and clubs, each set with barbs very jagged and cruel to see. Before them marched an old white-haired man clad in a white robe beautifully ornamented

around the hem and throat with painted figures, these at our distance impossible to distinguish clearly. He carried a green flowering branch and nothing else, so that the meaning was plain—we might have either peace or war!

Now these folk stopped a little distance out of the greenery, while the old man came on alone to the very edge of the water, and here he paused and called out to us in a clear pleasant voice that seemed the very essence of peaceful living and happy carefree ways.

Myrdhinn climbed up on the bulwark and tried several languages, gesturing at the sun, the sea, the sky and land, while for his part the other old man answered in possibly more than one dialect, but no common ground could be found for conversation, till at last each gave up his efforts and stood smiling at the other in humorous bewilderment across the intervening waters. Then Myrdhinn said:

"Put the boat overside. I am going ashore."

And this we did against our wills, fearing treachery, but Myrdhinn's mind was made up and his will was firm. So ashore he went, and we could see their arms waving as they gesticulated and strove to make themselves understood.

At length, the old man pointed inland in silent invitation, and Myrdhinn nodded, and all in an instant it seemed, the twain had turned and were gone from our sight, with many of the armed men following, though some were left. These were all big, strong fellows well able, it seemed to us, to cast a spear out to where we lay; so unobtrusively we trained the arrow engine, loaded with a full sheaf of arrows, upon them and swung also the port catapult in their direction. We were now almost certain that, despite the rolling of the vessel, we could drop the boulder among them. Then we grasped our bows behind the bulwarks—and waited.

THE sun rose high and higher, until at almost midday, Myrdhinn and the other old man came back with their following of curious spearmen.

"Lay down your arms, my friends!" he shouted. "Come ashore to me on Brandon's Isle, for this is truly the land we seek. Leave a guard of fifty and come, you others."

While he was speaking, the old islander harangued his followers to somewhat similar effect, for each stepped forward and threw down his weapon to form a pile on the sand, after which they moved back some twenty feet and showed us their empty hands.

All this time, since daybreak, there had been a rolling mutter of small drums, neither loud nor very far inland. This threatening sound now stopped and the hush that followed pressed down upon our accustomed ears, as might another noise.

In this deathly quiet, I gave low commands and our other boat was lowered and sent ashore, where some leaped out and joined Myrdhinn and others brought back the two boats, plying between ship and shore until all of us were there with the exception of the guards, the tormentæ men and the arrow-engineers.

"For," I warned, "these strangers may meditate treachery; wherefore keep sharp watch and be ready to cover our retreat if need be."

So, once lined in formation upon the sands, at my signal we stepped forward three paces together and cast down our bows, our shortswords, even our eating-daggers, and stood facing the islanders' array across the two piles of weapons—two unarmed companies, each with its holy man in front.

Then Myrdhinn and the old priest stepped forward and kissed each other, and as they did so, the drumming burst out with a great fury. We stared at one another, almost tempted to reach for our

weapons, wondering if this meant attack —and the bushes behind those facing us swayed and parted and through them came a large crowd of women, grass and flower clad, and many naked children—all smiling very prettily, chattering among themselves with merry laughter, while they proffered us gifts of flowers and fruits.

Very acceptable was this fruit to our salt-soaked palates, and marvelously good, though strange in taste and form. And thus the islanders took us to their hearts and we made a home with them for a month, a happy interlude in our stern lives.

So we rested, some making progress in the language, with a fair tutor to conjugate the amatory verbs; some hunting among the interior hills or fishing in the bay; while we all took turns in working a few hours each day on the "Prydwen," which we had careened in a shallow cove, to scrape away the sea growths and re-calk.

We stepped a new artemon, replaced some warped planking and two charred ribs amidships, making the ship ready for sea, though we had not thought of sailing so soon as we were actually to do.

One evening a hunting-party came back with a strange tale of an ancient man whom they had met upon the island's farther coast and whom they had known for white (these folk being rather golden in color), for he had spoken to them in the language of the Scoti.

One of the Cambrians was familiar with this tongue, having been prisoner and slave beyond the Hibernian sea; so he answered and learned that we were truly upon Brandon's Isle, for the oldster had been in company with Brandon upon the first voyage of that venturesome monk, and liking the country well, he had taken a native wife and remained when the others returned to their own land.

Nor, thinking the matter over as we sailed in quest of him around the coast, could I blame him in my heart, for these island ladies, though thoroughly barbarian, are very lovely and dignified both in form and manner, and anyone might well do worse than remain in this Elysium, should occasion offer. But that was not for us. All unknowing, we sailed on toward our destiny—and war, excitement and change was waiting for us in the person of that one old man.

Arriving, we found him so aged that he was dying slowly from his load of years. However, his eye was bright and his tongue nimble through the joy of our coming, when in his age he had given up all hope and almost all thought of seeing a face from his native lands.

In the cool darkness of his grass house, Myrdhinn sat and talked with him alone; for the excitement of seeing so many of us fair drove him frantic with joy and at first he could not speak for the choking in his throat, but sat looking at us with slow tears trickling into his waist-long beard. But to Myrdhinn he *could* talk and make himself understood, though the Scoti words came slow and he fumbled among his thoughts to say the thing he would.

And a tale he had to tell us!

IT SEEMS (and now this is the part that directly concerns us, and you, my Emperor) that Brandon did not know there were still more lands westward of those he found, and Fergus the Scot had not learned of this for a long time. Then a party of young men looking for adventure had invited him with them on a plundering trip to a near-by island, and they in their log boats were blown far to the northwest, and out of their path, by one of the quickly coming storms of wind, common to these seas, called by the natives Hurakan, from the name of the god who they believe inspires the disturbance.

Finally they found land and explored it, sailing both north and south, but not

penetrating far inland; for this it seemed to them was more than an island, and what people or monsters might dwell there they could not know. Before they left this part of the land they found that a war-like folk held the coast, for they were surprised one night as they slept beneath their boats and many killed; so that, although they had left in a score of craft, the survivors came home again in three, without loot or captive women, though they had a prisoner of those who had attacked them. I saw the skin, stuffed, of this being, and whether it is human or no, I hesitate to say. The skin is scaly and slippery with slime (in the living state) the creature spending much time in the sea. The eyes are round rather than ovoid, and lashless; the nostrils flat and inconspicuous as though meant to hold themselves in against the water. Below a broad lipless mouth filled with pointed fangs, on either side of the scaly neck, are marks very similar to the gills of fishes, but they neither open nor close, so that if they were once water-dwellers entirely, it must have been very long ago.

The legs are bandy, and in back, at the end of a ridged backbone is a bony projection, varying with the age of the creature, from six to ten inches in length, so that when the individual sits, it must needs scoop a hole in the earth to accommodate this immovable tail or rest itself upon a log or stone.

The feet and hands are webbed, each digit tipped with a curved sharp claw; so in battle, though knowing the use of no artificial weapon except the hurling of stones, they are very formidable enemies, and Fergus and his companions were lucky to escape.

After that one excursion, Fergus roamed no more, but stayed at home and raised sturdy sons and daughters to comfort his old age. So after telling Myrdhinn of these things and what he could remember of the way thither, and showing us this stuffed trophy, and having held speech of this and that, with many questions of his homeland, which Myrdhinn out of his long memory and many travels could well satisfy him, he dismissed us for that day, promising himself the pleasure of a further talk upon the morrow.

Then the people of that part of the island (Cubanacan they call it) did make a feast for us, and we slept peacefully among friends, but on the morrow when Myrdhinn went to visit this oldster, he was found to be dead on his couch, smiling with happiness.

So died this self-made exile. May I die as content, which, my Emperor, depends on you!

The eldest two sons of Fergus we took on board, for they were determined to be of us, and indeed we knew from *that* family, two only would not be missed. Also we felt somehow that they might be of use to us, might bring us good fortune in finding this far mysterious land of the Two Hesperides.

Again we returned to our first landing, stayed about a week, though pressed to remain and dwell there with this friendly, well-disposed folk, and not without sorrow and a little heartache at leaving, we sailed—this time companied with ten-score boats filled with our friends.

They led and followed and circled round about us, for a long distance, till a fine breeze sprang up and filled our sails, whereupon it was "In oars and rest," and we watched them drop away a few at a time, as the paddlers grew weary and the land faded from sight.

Then at last the land was gone, not even its highest point showing on the horizon, like a distant dingy cloud, and the last lingering boat had fallen behind with our promises to return soon, and we scarce could see the glitter of their high-flung wet paddles in last farewell. And even they disappeared.

"Taino's" they named themselves to us. "Good men." And finer people I have never met, for true cordiality and gentleness to strangers.

We sailed the sea all alone, not even a bird to company us, westward again, sailing to return to that peaceful, happy isle of Brandon's nevermore.

6. *Castaways*

DAYS went and came, with rain and sun, and we sailed—we sailed—a dreary round of days, threading through numbers of low islands, uninhabited and desolate, all very lonely to see.

Not long after we left, Myrdhinn found odd sea-treasure, which I may well mention here, for its results brought us as much good as Guthlac's fishskin armor brought us woe.

One day we came across a floating log with branches upon it, and in those branches perched a large land bird, green in hue, croaking a sad lament as the log rolled, now this way, now that, so that this castaway was alternately submerged and raised, streaming from drenched feathers.

Mightily encouraged by the thought that we were sailing rightly, Myrdhinn would not let us pass by, though we had little inclination to do so, feeling our hearts go out in pity to this forlorn, helpless thing, and even more inclined to a rescue by the fact, as you may know, that green is one of the colors sacred to the Druids.

So Myrdhinn, sometimes Druid, sometimes Christian, considered this finding to be an omen of singular good fortune.

We steered close to pick up the bird, and as we drew near, it spread its wings and tried to fly to us, but being so soaked with water, it fell into the sea and was sinking when we arrived. One of the bards hooked out the bird, handing it to Myrdhinn, but even in his hands it gasped, fluttered, rolled an eye and became still.

Myrdhinn mourned, but magic could not help here—we had come too late. Though he could fan through the years, embers of life to a healthy glow, when the last spark was gone he was helpless. No more than any man could he raise from the dead.

Perhaps foreseeing what importance his act was to hold, or from sentiment, he ordered the skin cured and of it he made himself a magnificent head-dress, during the long days of exploring little islands.

In his ceremonial robes, mystically embroidered with strange symbols, and with this hat upon his head, the bird's head proudly raised, beak half open as though it might emit a clarion call, he looked to be what he truly was — a very Prince of Magic.

Deeper we penetrated into this maze of islets, but found no mainland till we had passed through into open water again. Unexpectedly the color of the water changed and became of a muddy hue, and not long after we sighted a low coast from which poured a wide turbid river, bringing much silt and floating rubbish down to the sea.

By this we knew that a broad land lay before us, and cautious of exploring it, having seen one of its inhabitants, we coasted for some time, enjoying fair weather, and did not set foot on shore though we saw no signs of life, either beasts or human, only many, many birds which followed us for the scraps which our cook threw overside.

We sailed for so long that we began to perceive that we, in following the coastline, were turning back southward toward Brandon's Isle, and here our water gave out and we put in to fill our butts.

Everywhere here were abominable swamps and barren lands. The water was brackish and not fit to drink, so we sailed further on and still saw nothing but salt morasses, without smoke of fire or sign of any friendly folk.

At last we did see a section of coast that

appeared better than the rest, having clumps of green trees indicating springs, and a little cove for anchorage. So we put over a boat, and Guthlac being urgent to go ashore, we let him go, taking ten of his own Saxons with butts and buckets, and some of our own folk to help.

They being armed, we had no fear for them, having seen for so long an uninhabited coast, and so watched some scatter among the rocks hunting for shellfish, and others pass out of sight in the greenery looking for sweet water, and after went about our duties.

From these we were startled by shouts from shore, and our party among the rocks came running back, and hotly pursuing came a band of those fierce, scaly, frog-like creatures, hurling stones and croaking; lolloping along on their short bandy legs, sometimes erect and sometimes on all fours, as fast as a horse could run.

And there before our eyes they dragged down, tore to scraps, and devoured our comrades!

At this uproar, the others came running back from the trees and in horror, paused at the sight of carnage. I saw Guthlac form them, Saxon and Roman alike, into the Saxon shield wall, and then they were buried from sight in the croaking, snapping horde. How could we shoot? All were closely intermingled.

Once the throng opened and I saw Guthlac again, streaming with blood, split with his terrible notched seaxe a creature from crown to teeth, and losing then his weapon, he snatched out his ax and laid about him, until they closed in again and we could see nothing. But we noticed how those sharp claws slid harmlessly from his fishskin armor, whereas they tore through leather jerkins like cloth.

THE end came quickly. Many more came pouring out of the swampy lands and Marcus, who had hawk eyes, thought he saw a prisoner hustled away in the press, and took him to be Guthlac, but could not be sure, for by this time our trumpeter had sounded "Battle Stations!"

Seizing bows, our archers were pouring arrows among the throng, but they, though never having imagined such a novelty, pressed forward thinking nothing of it, and indeed at our distance the most of these arrows rattled harmlessly among them, though the stones they threw fell upon our decks, their strong arms being quite the match for an ordinary slinger in precision and distance.

Then our port arrow engine went off with a clatter, pouring a whole quiver of arrows into their front; and each piercing more than one in the horde, they fell by dozens, and the rest setting up a hullabaloo of croaks and grunts, splashed into the water after us.

We cut the anchor free, never stopping to raise it, and our oars whitening the waves, we sped out of the cove, they pursuing like a dolphin school until we dropped a boulder into the thick of them; whereupon they dove and followed under water for a long way, until they saw the futility of pursuit, and turned back.

Now to turn tail as we did may not have been a Roman deed, yet it was most wise, though you at your distance may not think it, for had we stayed, surely our expedition would have ended without more ado.

Down the coast we went, lorn in our hearts for good fighting-companions we had lost, Wulfgar raging mad at the loss of his brother, anxious to leap over and swim back that he might kill and die, until finally his own folk seized him and carried him below, frothing in his beard, and put an oar in his grip and bade him row. And row he did, and heard the stout wood creak and lost his sorrow in work.

So, thirsty beyond belief until we found upon a bare little islet some pools of rain-

water not quite dried, we went south along this unfriendly coast, rounded a cape and found ourselves going north again. Shortly after, rain gave us drink and filled our remaining butts. We continued up the coast, seeing lovely beaches and green-fronded trees, and were sure that this section would be more hospitable, but durst not venture a landing.

Far we sailed, taking turn about at the oars, the Saxons rowing port on their shift, in competition with a crew of archers to starboard, while the next shift pitted a number of sailors against the crews of the tormentæ and the arrow engines; the third shift being composed of Romano-British against Cymry of pure blood.

Thus we made sport of labor, wagering that one would tire before another, rotating the crews so that the labor would be equal among all.

This long routine was broken at last by the skies growing like dark bronze, and in the heavens sounded a dreadful ominous humming. We knew by these signs, as your sailors must learn and be advised, that the fierce wind god, Hurakan, was abroad and raging.

We furled the sail we had been carrying in hope of a wind and rowed out to sea into the coming darkness that we might not be driven ashore. Here our shipman caused a sea anchor to be cast over, we running with bare poles, and keeping our course with oar-play as the wind struck.

The seas roared and raged, hurling us about like a helpless chip, while our two islanders, very sick for perhaps the first time in their lives, had no strength to control themselves, but were thrown about till finally we strapped them in a bunk for their own safety.

Night came and with it no relief from the furious wind. I beat my way against it into Myrdhinn's cabin and caught my breath, which was almost impossible outside.

"Almost exactly the way we found Brandon's Isle," smiled Myrdhinn. "Storm, night falling, a passing of the wind, and in the morning a happy, peaceful, friendly land. Shall it be thus, tomorrow?"

"Pray the gods it may be so! However, this wind shows no sign of passing; so let us beseech them in their mercy, that they not bring us too close to land in this howling dark and wind——"

And during these words of mine, we struck!

WE BOTH were hurled against the side of the cabin; I heard the artemon snap, and the mast break short off, and the thunder of the two halves of the mast, falling into the rowers' pit, carrying planking with it, and the screams of the dying men that Myrdhinn and I had brought so far through so many perils, famine, war and thirst—to die in the dark on an unknown coast at the end of the world.

The cabin door was jammed, but I hacked it open with my shortsword, feeling the dromon shudder at each tremendous wave which, striking us on the side, swept completely over us, rocking our "Prydwen" like a cradle. As it rocked, I could hear our planking crunch and splinter and the surge of ocean flowing free in our cargo and ballast, drowning out the rowers' pit, and heard a great voice crying to the dead below:

"Witta! Bleda! Cissa! Oswulf!"

No answer came.

"Tofig! Beotric! Oisc! Balday!" I knew the voice for Wulfgar's.

"I told you no Saxons would trouble Roman settlements!" shouted Myrdhinn in my ear.

The cabin floor became lost beneath the water.

However, by the time it lapped our knees, I had the way cleared and we rushed out.

It was dark as the bowels of Tartarus

and the seas roared in at us, almost unseen until we were struck.

I heard a gurgling cry: "Health to Woden!" and, hurled from my feet in the watery dark, together with Myrdhinn, knew that the last of the Saxons had gone overboard before me. At once I was separated from my companion and was gripped by a savage undertow that strove to hurry me out to sea.

I dove deep into it, swimming strongly in the same direction, to find myself free when I rose. As best I could, I turned back toward the coast, listening for the crash of billows to guide me through the screaming spume-filled night, and finally did hear the distant boom as our wreck pounded herself to pieces on this merciless shore.

Struggling toward the sound, I thanked God for His mercies, in that I could swim well and also for the fact that no hampering armor bore me down. As I approached the shore, I heard a strangled cry directly ahead and violently collided with a feebly thrashing form which at first gripped my shoulders, but we both sinking, he released me and struck out for the surface.

I rose beside him, my fingers gripped in his beard and knew from its length that I had found Myrdhinn. Before we had time to exchange a word, had such been possible, my feet touched bottom, and crying encouragement into that ancient person's ear, I heaved mightily, and aided by a wave that rolled us like a pair of knucklebones, Neptune cast us, our legs and arms tangled, far up on a sandy shore.

All but spent, we yet clawed on a few paces from the fury of the water, and exhausted near to dying, we lay down for a time. Then, my heart pounding no more as though it sought to burst my breast, I got up, bidding the seer to remain where he was while I sought along the shore for survivors; and so went along the strand for a short distance when, feeling myself followed, I turned and found this dauntless graybeard close behind. I clasped him close, feeling his withered body shake with cold under his drenched robes, and the throb of his unconquerable heart, and without words we went on together.

Never before had I felt such a kinship with this old man as at this time, when, if ever, he might have been expected to take first thought for himself. The immortal spirit in him drove on the creaking carcass and laughed at distress, the storm and catastrophe.

Truly, whatever the unhallowed bargain with the Dark, whatever perpetuated his being beyond that of normal life, whatever his failings, Myrdhinn was very much a man!

We pushed on into the watery wind and had not gone far before finding a body. After some labor the man gasped and spoke, and we knew him for Marcus, my sister's son. He was grievously pounded and sore and complained of head pains; so searching there we found a gash and bound it up, as well as might be in a darkness so profound that, working, I could scarce see my fingers.

I left him in Myrdhinn's care and beseeched them both, if the lad were able soon, to return along the beach, searching, while I kept on in the original direction. I had not far to seek. Indeed, it seemed that everyone must have been washed ashore, so often did my questing feet stumble over bodies lying in or just above the surf, as I followed the shoreline just within the lap of the waves.

Whenever I came upon one, I dragged him high and worked upon him till recovery or until I was certain that further effort was useless, and eventually among a little company of seven rescued, I heard my last-found survivor gasp, choke and breathe again, and looked around me to find that the darkness had appreciably lightened.

Now I could make out faces through the murk, recognize them, and beyond through a spurt of the driving rain that still rushed over us in fitful bursts as though a tank above was overturning to drench us anew every few moments, I made out a dim mass approaching from the direction in which we had been searching.

This mass soon resolved itself into a little crowd of twenty, and learning from them that all progress beyond was blocked by a deep inlet, and that all living stood before us, we returned along the shore in the direction of the wreck. We scattered widely inland on the chance that some of our people might have been able to struggle farther away from the waves than I had searched.

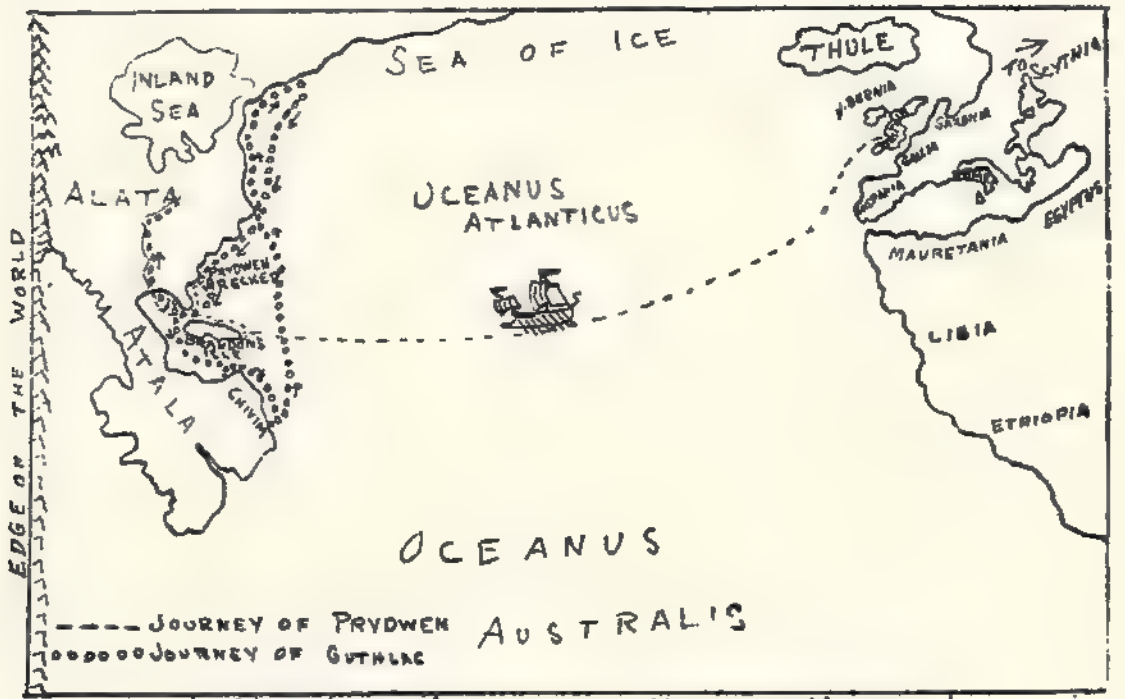
NO MORE living were found here, though we rescued two poor drowned bodies that the sea was sporting with in the shallows, tumbling them about like cat at play with mouse. We bore them along and added them to the growing company of the dead—two new members whose loss and whose lost experience we as yet scarcely appreciated. We were to grieve over them more bitterly in the days to come.

One was the shipman, and at his death we were already struck with an increasing dread. How without his guiding knowledge of the sea, the courses of wind and wave, might we ever return to Britain or Rome?

It seemed ironical, as we sought among the dead, that Neptune had taken only his god-children and spurned us landsmen. Those gathered about me were, without exception, fighting-men, and the dead on the beach were mostly the crew of the ship.

The other, whom we had just laid down, was the one man from all our company (save Myrdhinn) we could least have spared, though we did not realize that just then and mourned the shipman much and Morgo, the smith, but little.

Yet, with the passing of Morgo, like-



THE WORLD ACCORDING TO VENTIDIUS VARRO

wise passed our knowledge of metals and their working, and though in later years Myrdhinn was able to help from his books, we had lost the practical knowledge needed to apply what he could tell us and suffered from this loss in many ways. Indeed, one of our most hazardous exploits sprang from this very lack of ability and brave men were done to death, as you will see at the proper time.

The gray skies brightened, though still overcast with scudding clouds. We left the dead for the time and hastened on toward the wrecked "Prydwen." It was a sad sight which greeted us.

The dromon had broken in half under the incessant pounding, and only the forepart remained whole, lying in a nest of rocks, some hundred yards out from shore. The after portion was greatly crumbled away and lost, while with it had gone the most of our gear, as we already knew, for the strand was strewn with refuse. Clothing was tangled with weed, as also provision chests, arrows, bows and planking; in fact, anything that would float.

So, with despair, we came to where Myrdhinn, Marcus and other rescued stood beside very many drowned and dead, among them Wulfgar Ironbelly, and all but one of the bards, looking disconsolate; and here we saw this bard trying valiantly to strike out an accompaniment to his keening, from a harp as drenched and tuneless as he.

His doleful clamor, fitting all too well the depressing state we were in, put us all in a mood to sit down, clasp hands, weep together and die there in the cold rain without an effort to help ourselves. I could not stand it, and dashed the harp from his hands, turning such a furious face upon him that he raised his arm against the expected blow and ceased complaining about "white-maned sea horses who trample the brave and daring beneath their hooves of silver!"

All stood aghast, for to those of British blood, the person of a bard is sacred and to interrupt a keening is sacrilege. Whatever I did now must be done quickly or the moment of decisive action would pass and be wasted.

I spoke—to Myrdhinn—but loudly that all might hear.

"Sir and leader! Under your command we have gone beyond the farthest bounds of the Scoti explorers. We are lost now. Our shipman is dead and also the majority of the crew."

Myrdhinn started. He motioned for me to continue.

"Sir! Unless you can lead us whence we came, out of this land where no Roman has come before us, in this land we must live and die. I see around me no more than fifty living people out of the ten score who sailed from Isca three months agone. We are all, save you, comparatively young men; our arms, our tools, our valuables and garments lie yonder in that wreck and the tide is ebbing. Even your tools of magic are there, without which a man be he however wise can do little. Should we therefore bide here listening to this lonesome caterwauling over those who, however well intentioned, can do nothing for us wherever they are now? The prudent man looks to his own welfare first, and mourns the dead later! Strip, men, and into the sea! We'll save what we can!"

As though some dark spell were lifted from the hearts of all, they raised a hoarse cheer and we began to work and live again, the bard peeling down as nimbly as any, though spitting curses like a cat in muddy water, at thought of his interrupted dirge. But in the struggle of salvage, even he began to recover his spirits and shouted as lustily as any or grinned upon some lucky find.

Only Myrdhinn kept away, and though I had almost expected as much, he being old and not fit for much rough work in the

numbing waters, it grieved me to see him going inland, head down as though in somber thought, until hidden behind trees which grew not far away.

I felt that I had usurped authority, had rebelled against my superior, had made a breach between myself and one whom I respected and feared.

Yet it was not my fault if our natures conflicted. I am a practical man, a man of earth and things earthy. Myrdhinn was a man of the spirit, and although he had fought and upon one occasion taken the command away from Arthur, leading the troops to victory, it was foreign to his nature. To him, it doubtless had seemed most important to speed the departing spirits of our dead companions in the time-hallowed manner. To me, it seemed ridiculous. I could not help it. I was made so, and am of that mind today.

But, from the moment of that speech, I began to gain power over the minds of the survivors, and Myrdhinn to lose in proportion to my rising authority, though he always considered himself in command.

It was in my mind that he had gone away to be alone, but I saw soon how wrongly I had judged his character when, resting beside our goods, I saw a curl of smoke beyond the trees. I was about to seize sword and rally the men, thinking this an enemy fire, when Myrdhinn appeared and beckoned us. So thither we went and found that he had discovered a snug spot among the tree-clad dunes, where the savage shout of the wind was stifled to a murmur, and the smoke from a welcome blaze went straight almost to the tree-tops.

"There are a few things, Ventidius, that I can do without my tools of magic," he said in a low voice, and smiled.

I felt ashamed and could say nothing, though why I should feel remorse seemed strange. He pressed my arm and left me to dry myself, nor ever after did he refer to my outburst on that disastrous day.

And now I must admit to a very grievous fault in leadership.

Here we were, some fifty poor castaways, thrown up from the sea upon a wild, perhaps a hostile, shore. Yet I neglected, at the sight of warmth and comfort, to give the simplest order of precaution and instead of commanding various men to gather up weapons that we might arm, dry our bowstrings, and be ready whatever might occur, I pushed lustily into the circle about the fire.

It was comfortable there, and the steam soon rose from our bare bodies. We twisted and turned, quite content in the glow, and then our chatter was hushed as we caught sight, upon the brink of an overlooking knoll above us, of a number of very peculiar people.

You will not want to miss the thrill of the fascinating chapters that carry on this story in next month's WEIRD TALES. We suggest that you reserve your copy at your magazine dealer's now.

"God only knows what strange flotsam the sea might spew forth."

Spawn of the Maelstrom

By AUGUST W. DERLETH & MARK SCHORER

What thing of evil stalked the earth in the likeness of Jason Warwick? A shuddery tale of the Lofoten Islands

NOBODY speaks of Jason Warwick any more, nor mentions his strange disappearance from the face of the earth. It was a twenty-day mystery for the press, though Scotland Yard stuck at it for almost as many months before filing the case unsolved. But there are two people who know what happened and cannot speak, and only two—Sir John Hardie and I: only the two of us who know why and how Warwick vanished. Sir John has said it ought to be put down, even if only for cynical disbelief after we are gone. But some record of the weird and terrible incarnate evil that existed on an invisible plane parallel to ours must be left in the facts attending Jason Warwick's disappearance.

The mystery had its roots in Warwick's trip to the Lofoten Islands. Just before he left, I met him at the British Museum. He seemed curiously exhilarated, and his dark, handsome features were eager. He was hatless, and went about, despite a light fog, without a waterproof in his rather shabby, suit, the typical clothing already marking him out as eccentric.

"I say, Bassett—what a lucky meeting!" he began without preamble. "I want you to do something for me, will you? I've been trying to get in touch with Sir John Hardie, and I can't seem to do it. Can't get him on the wire, because he seems to have run over to Paris on business—and a telegram's too impersonal. Will you call him when he comes back and tell him from me that I've gone off to the Lofoten Islands and that I'll write to him from there?"

"Glad to," I said. "What's taking you off this time?"

"A corking legend—really believed in, too, Bassett—that's the splendid part of it. But I can't stop to tell you about it, because my machine's waiting, and I must be off. Besides, I know enough to make me want to look into the matter. You know what these queer old beliefs do to me!"

I did know of Jason Warwick's fascination for strange beliefs existing in out-of-the-way places of the earth. "Supernatural again?" I asked, as he began to move away.

He half turned. "Nothing but that," he called back. "Very deep and sinister, Bassett—the shivery kind." Then he got into his Daimler and was gone.

Sir John Hardie returned from Paris shortly after Warwick had left England, and I found him quite easily at the Eton Club, of which both of us were members. Over liquor, I mentioned Warwick.

"He's gone to the Lofoten Islands. He left word with me for you—said he'd write you about the place as soon as he got there. Which led me to believe that you had been discussing the islands with him before he went. Have I hit it? If so, what's sent him off like that?"

Sir John did not immediately reply. His eyes narrowed abruptly, and he ran a finger meditatively along the line of his jaw. "I wish he hadn't gone, Bassett," he said finally.

"Well," I put in, "if you mean that it's another wild-goose chase, I'm inclined to agree."

Sir John shrugged. "I didn't mean that. In fact, Bassett, I'm suggesting just the opposite; from vague hints that I've been gathering, it's beginning to strike me that perhaps the legend hanging about the island of Vömma, to which he's gone, may be something more than superstitious claptrap."

"What's the legend?"

"Nothing very clear, but certainly unusual, to put it mildly," replied Sir John. "The natives—good Norwegian stock, too—believe firmly in the existence of a deathless creature of some sort—some of them say it's a man; some are positive it's an animal—who is confined to the uninhabited island of Vömma."

"Deathless?" I cut in, perplexed. "What, exactly, is meant by that?"

"I don't know precisely. I gather that the thing's been seen by successive generations, through at least four centuries, and naturally the belief that the thing cannot die, grew and continues to flourish."

"They've investigated, surely?"

Sir John nodded. "But not of late years. Something happened to some of them, and since then no one will go near the island.

"I looked Vömma up on a map of the islands I had sent to me, and it appears that it is quite near the Maelstrom—and God only knows what strange flotsam the sea might spew forth on the island! I've an uncanny idea that Warwick will find out more than he's bargained for. I've never cared about his unholy fascination for ancient superstitions and legends. I'm not exactly a fool, Bassett, but I don't think it's wise to push such interests too far; I think you know what I mean. Well, I'll look for letters from him; I daresay he'll be able to manage very well for himself. Nevertheless, I wish he hadn't gone."

MORE than that Sir John would not say. We parted after some small talk and I did not see him again until Warwick's return. As a matter of fact, Jason Warwick had been in London some time before any of his friends knew of his return from the Lofotens. I was the first to see him.

The meeting was accidental, and though it was very short, it left an indelible impression on my mind. I had gone into Selfridge's, and ran into Warwick standing near the main entrance, watching the stream of people passing in and out of the building with a curiously rapt interest. He did not notice me, even when I stepped directly into his line of vision. Perhaps I would have considered this fully as strange as it actually was, for Warwick had a reputation for extraordinary alertness, had it not been for the momentary excitement of coming upon him so suddenly, when to the best of my knowledge he was far from England.

I stepped up to him, put my hand on his arm, and said, "Well, Warwick—you're back!"

His reaction was astounding. He turned slowly and looked at me. His eyes were cold, and his face was perfectly expressionless. Then abruptly a change came upon his features; his expression grew somewhat intense, as if he were seeking by great mental effort to recall something long lost to memory. And then he spoke.

"Why, it's Bassett—of course. You've changed."

I had not changed, and I knew it. It was he who had changed. He had gone away a light-hearted young man, and had returned as a cold, hard individual many years older. It was that that impressed me from the first: a baffling feeling of age emanating from the still youthful Warwick. What had happened to him in the Lofoten Islands to change him so? He was decidedly not the same man who had gone to the islands. Even his belated rec-

ognition of me came with obvious hesitation—as if he were forcing the words from his lips.

And somehow, too, his voice was harsher, deeper, colder. With an effort, I spoke to him again, hoping that I had masked my surprise.

"When did you get back?"

He waved a stiff hand with an attempted airiness which did not quite come off, and said, "Oh, quite some time ago, Bassett. Some days."

"Well, you've kept yourself hidden, indeed. What's got into you?" I asked.

"Been very busy, Bassett." He fell abruptly silent, and again that intensely thoughtful expression crept over his face. He passed a hand across his eyes. Then he said, again with effort, "Let me see—you are still at the same place, I think? Weren't there some letters—I wrote you——"

With some surprise, I said, "No, you wrote me no letters. I'm afraid you wrote only to Sir John Hardie, Warwick."

He did not apparently notice the surprise in my voice. His face lightened a moment. "Of course, it was Sir John. And where is he now, Bassett? Still at——"

"His country place," I put in. "Melcombe House, in Kent."

He nodded vaguely, but with some satisfaction manifest on his face. Then he took my hand in his, shook it stiffly, and began to walk rapidly away with long loping steps not at all characteristic of him. I was too surprised to follow, and the touch of his hand even more disturbed me, for it was cold and unfeeling as arctic stone!

From Selfridge's I went at once to my apartment, where I was spared the necessity of calling Sir John Hardie, as I had intended to do, for Sir John himself was waiting for me. I saw at a glance that he looked worried.

"I've come to see you about Warwick," he said at once. "I'm a little worried about him—afraid something's happened to him up there."

"I've just seen him," I cut in.

"Seen him!" exclaimed Sir John. "Where?"

"Why—in Selfridge's."

"Well, then, at any rate, he's safe enough."

"But he's changed," I said, and went on to describe my strange encounter with Jason Warwick.

Sir John was considerably disturbed. "Seems he *has* run into something up there," he said at last. "I'll have to see him at once. I can't imagine his having forgotten his letters to me." He stopped abruptly and looked at me oddly. "Which reminds me that it was his letters I came to talk to you about."

He got up and walked across the room in silence once or twice.

"I didn't like the tone of his letters, for one thing," he said finally, coming to a stop before me. "Had me worried. They weren't very clear. He seemed excited—natural enough, I suppose. Then for a good time I had no letter at all from him. I was beginning to think that something had happened, and came here to talk to you, Bassett. But now that you've seen him I daresay he's all right."

But Sir John did not sound convincing. My story had bothered him as it continued to bother me. However, he evidently did not wish to discuss Warwick's strange attitude until he had seen him and talked with him.

THUS the matter stood for a few days. I did not see Warwick again, and efforts to locate him at his usual haunts were fruitless. A call put through to Sir John's country place served to inform me that Sir John had spent the past days on the Continent, but was expected back within a few hours and had left word for me to run down for dinner that night.

That was on the third day after my encounter with Warwick.

So it was that I was down at Melcombe House when Sir John returned from the Continent toward evening. That he was strangely disturbed I saw at once. What bothered him, however, he was loath to say, for nothing passed between us save desultory remarks upon his trip and the present unusually balmy weather.

It was long after dinner when I said finally, "Something's bothering you, Sir John. Why not tell me?"

He shrugged. "I want to get in touch with Warwick first," he said, adding, "if possible."

I did not press him. We were sitting at the time in his trophy room on the second floor. We sat there in silence for a considerable time, and finally I took up a book, seeing that Sir John was apparently not going to open his thoughts to me.

I think it was close upon midnight when there came an interruption. Quiet had descended upon the countryside, and a thin moon had risen. I was standing at the window when I heard someone on the floor below.

At first I thought it was Sir John's night watchman, Sullatt, and paid no attention to the sounds. It was not until somewhat later that it occurred to me that the sounds were not at all like those Sullatt would make—they were too stealthy, like creeping footsteps. This thought had no sooner occurred to me than the sound of another pair of advancing footsteps came from around one corner of the rambling house.

Then abruptly came a hoarse cry from below. "Robbers!"

"Sullatt!" exclaimed Sir John, coming quickly to the window and peering over my shoulders. The window was wide open; so both of us leaned out.

There, below us, on the lawn, some twenty feet from the house, stood a dark figure shouting at the top of his lungs—"Robbers in the library!"

Abruptly a dark form hurtled from the shadowy lower floor and launched itself straight across the lawn at Sullatt. The night watchman went down like a log; behind me Sir John whirled and ran from the room.

I would have followed, but at the same instant someone else reached the library below and turned on the light—and I saw the face of the man who was struggling with Sullatt! Sullatt was on his back, his arms beating feebly upward, and his mysterious assailant was bending over him, his shoulders oddly misshapen and hunched up, straining the clothes that seemed to bind his body—all this I saw as the light from the library streamed out across the lawn from the open French window. All this—and more. For as the light flashed forth and Sullatt lay quiet, the marauder looked up and at the house, his head thrown back, his mouth horribly distended, and his eyes glaring into the light—and it was *the face of Jason Warwick!*

A moment later he turned and vanished in the darkness beyond the hedge. Then I ran down the stairs, and came into the library just as Sir John was running out by way of the French window. The butler had preceded him to where Sullatt lay, and I was not far behind when he reached the body.

For body it was—Sullatt was dead, and his face as he lay there was awful to see. And despite the shortness of the time that had elapsed between his sudden death and our coming, his body was rigid and cold as arctic stone!

Sir John turned away with a shudder, directing the butler in a low voice to summon the proper authorities and attend to the removal of the body. He passed me by without so much as a glance, but by the set lines of his face I knew that he had seen what I had seen—the face of Jason War-

wick. And at the French window he stopped, turned on me, grasping my arm in a vise-like grip, and whispered in a harsh voice, "You saw—Warwick?"

I nodded.

"Say nothing." Then he went rapidly into the room, where evidence of the robbery still abounded in articles strewn about the furniture. He made a rapid survey.

"I hope your loss hasn't been too great," I ventured.

He looked at me oddly. "I haven't lost much," he said slowly. "In fact—I've lost nothing at all of value, it seems. Only a packet of letters was taken."

"Documents?"

"No, personal letters." Then he paused significantly, and added, "Letters Warwick wrote me from the islands!"

IT WAS only after the local police had finished with us that Sir John was ready to explain. Even then he paced the floor for a long time before he said anything. But abruptly he came forward and stood bending over me, speaking in a harsh, excited voice not much above a whisper.

"That attack on Sullatt was a mistake—I believe it was meant for me, Bassett!"

My quick protest was interrupted by Sir John, who went on, speaking more rapidly. "Wait—remember that Sullatt looks much like me, same general portliness, height, carriage. Suppose someone wished to make a murderous attack on me—someone who knew only my general appearance—then such a mistake would be very easy to make."

I pondered this, and was forced to agree with Sir John. Then I spoke of what was uppermost in my mind. "You say Warwick's letters were taken—and we saw Warwick out there. And he surely would not make such a mistake as confusing Sullatt with you. Can you think of any reason for this mad occurrence?"

He nodded. "I think I can, Bassett. It is this—Jason Warwick is not the same man who went to the Lofoten Islands. Bassett, listen to me—I don't think he is Jason Warwick at all!"

Sir John paused only sufficiently to allow me to take in the statement he had just made; then he went on.

"And I'll tell you why, if you'll let me. The condition in which we found Sullatt has convinced me of something I've suspected for some hours now—say rather, something I've known, for I have proof, incontrovertible proof of something as incredible as I ever hope to know. Sullatt's body was cold as ice, and unbelievably rigid—but it wasn't the rigidity of *rigor mortis* because it came too soon for that. And the medical examiner didn't know what to make of that, as you know—but I think I do."

His voice was strangely tense, and his face was drawn.

"What do you mean?" I asked.

Sir John made a rapid calculation on his fingers, then turned to me again. "Nine days ago—or ten, I think—there was committed on the Continent the first of a series of murders of which I hope that Sullatt's murder is the last. There have now been ten murders in all. First there was a man in Norway, then another in Germany, and two more in France. Then came the others—all here in England—a customs man at Dover, a guard at an isolated station at which boat trains invariably stop, two laboring men in outer London, a country gardener in Warwickshire, and now—Sullatt.

"And every one of these victims was found cold and rigid—just as we found Sullatt—and cause of death could not be determined except in one or two cases when onlookers had witnessed attacks like the shocking assault we saw made upon Sullatt!"

I felt that the incredible events that had occurred were to be eclipsed by a climax

yet more incredible, but I did not fully understand, and said so.

Sir John cut me off impatiently. "It's plain as day, Bassett!" he exclaimed. "Those murders were committed along the route from the Lofoten Islands to London —the route Warwick must have taken on his return from Vömma!—the route he must undoubtedly have taken at a time coincidental with those mysterious murders!"

"But, good God, Sir John—you don't believe for an instant that Warwick was responsible for all of them?"

"Let me remind you that I don't think we're dealing with Warwick. Check back to your meeting with him, for instance. He seemed to think to recall who you were. And then he asked about me, about where I was at the time. That isn't like the Warwick you and I knew before he went to the islands, is it?"

"No," I admitted reluctantly.

"And now my home is entered," he went on, "and Warwick's own letters—the letters he asked you about so guardedly—are stolen. And Sullatt, who looks like me, is murdered.

"What does it look like?—as if there were something the man we call Warwick wanted desperately to conceal, doesn't it? Something he thought the real Warwick might have written me from Vömma—thus both the letters and Sir John Hardie must be destroyed!"

He paused for a moment, and then added, "Surely it is too much to believe all this merely coincidence, Bassett?"

I NODDED, glumly. Yet I was not convinced. Sir John was withholding something vital to the puzzle.

"Yes, it's all logical enough, God knows," I said. "But what's behind it? You've intimated that you knew. If so, why not tell me?"

He paced for a few moments in silence; then abruptly he sat down, lowered his face to his hands, and sat there for a minute or two. At length he came to a decision.

"I may need your help, Bassett," he began, "and I think you ought to know the secret of Vömma Island—as much as I know of it. I haven't told the police of Warwick, and I warned you to say nothing, because it would do no good to set the police after him. You and I will have to face him—and destroy him in our own way, and God forbid that we fail!" He shuddered as he spoke, communicating some of his inexplicable fear to me.

"You mean—we've got to kill him? Good God, Sir John, surely you aren't serious!" I protested.

"I am," he said. "Wait until you've heard what I've got to say, before you offer objections."

He took a moment in which to collect himself, and then began his incredible story.

"Some months ago, Warwick heard from one of his innumerable sources that a curious Lofoten legend was reputedly based on fact—a tale of a living-dead creature, of a soulless thing living entirely alone on the island of Vömma. I had heard this story many years ago, and I confess I could not take it as lightly as Warwick did. Believe me, Bassett, there are ancient forces of evil, unbelievable powers of abysmal darkness, existing in the cosmos—and sometimes they break through. I tried to prevent Warwick's going, but nothing would hold him back from the islands once he had heard the story.

"You know how abruptly he left. Well, I had a few scattered notes from him—as I told you. He wrote me how the Lofoten fishermen shunned the haunted island, going far out of their paths to avoid it even by day. Warwick went finally to see an old priest on the mainland, and from this priest he evidently learned quite a bit. He discovered first that already two men had been found dead—not at the same time, of

course; I think there was almost a century between their deaths—and it was firmly believed that the thing on Vömma had done for them. Bassett, those men were found rigid and cold as stone, and there was nothing to show how they had come by their death!"

He leaned forward, lowering his voice. "When he heard the priest's story, Warwick was naturally skeptical. He went in for the supernatural heavily, but he wan't a fool, by any means. He was determined to visit Vömma, even though everyone tried to dissuade him. The priest, when he heard of Warwick's intention, came from his retreat to beg him not to go, repeating that the thing on Vömma was of elder evil, that already it had taken the souls of two others. And he warned him especially that if the thing should take one more soul, it would be free of the island to which it had for so long been bound—free to roam the earth at will, killing and slaying to satisfy its horrible appetite, gathering strength with each new soul theft. And it was deathless!

"Yet even this did not deter Warwick. But when the priest saw that his pleading did no good, he gave Warwick a sort of charm, ostensibly for his protection. Warwick took it, but I'm afraid he didn't place much faith in it. Then he went to the island, arranging for someone to drop food fastened to a buoy quite a distance from the coast of Vömma, and to pick up anything he, Warwick, might leave there. From then on what happened is more or less indefinite, despite what I have tried to find out.

"I made some inquiries. Warwick's strange silence caused me to send a wire inquiring after him. Apparently he did not go out to the buoy for food, but there is definite evidence that he did return some time after first going to Vömma. Then, just a few days ago, I learned that a letter for me had been picked up in a floating bottle, evidently some days after it had been dropped. This afternoon that letter was waiting for me on my return from the Continent, and with it was the charm that the priest had given Warwick."

SIR JOHN reached into his inner pocket and brought forth a somewhat crumpled envelope. "Only the marked portions are important," he said.

I took the letter, asking, "How did this escape being taken tonight?"

"I had it in my pocket."

Then I turned my attention to the letter and began to read. It was the strangest document I have ever seen, and I do not expect ever to read a stranger. The letter was scrawled in Warwick's typically hurried hand, his great haste made apparent by frequent splotches of ink, erasures, and blocked-out sentences. I read, skipping all but the marked portions:

"My dear Hardie:

"The priest was right—and you were right before him; I should not have come. When you read this, I shall be dead. If what I fear might come to pass has happened, you will undoubtedly think me mad. But ask yourself this question: Is this Warwick who has come back from Vömma the man I knew? You must answer, *No!* . . . The legend you already know. I did not believe. May God forgive my skepticism! There are things of utter evil, ghastly beings beyond the knowledge of such puny minds as ours. Now, through my lack of foresight, my ironic disbelief, I have opened the door—and one of them has come through. . . .

"There is a man here. He has been living for centuries, yet has been dead for long ages. I should not have said a man—*a thing,* vague as it is, is better. Because it can assume any shape it chooses—it can be man or animal, and it can, if it wants, be any definite person. It is a man now. It is a thing of cosmic evil in the shape

of a man. . . . Already this thing has taken two souls, but it needs a third before it can go forth. Do you understand, can you understand what that means? It can go forth into the world, this age-old thing of evil, this thing that must have been on Vömma long before man inhabited the earth, this spawn of the Maelstrom, spewn forth a physical mass from the depths of the earth by the sea, and now inhabited by an animating spirit from the hellish cosmos, a spirit given pseudo-life and power by the souls of men. It can go forth into the world, almost deathless, eternal, and spread evil as its doctrine! . . . Only one thing can stop it; that is the charm, the five-pointed stone given me by the priest. But more of this later. . . .

"I came to Vömma last night, and at once I saw the thing slouching along in the dark. I was not afraid; I felt drawn to it. There is a hut here; it was built, the fishermen say, by one of their number long, long ago, the first man to die. I do not know anything definite about the early history of Vömma. To this hut I went, and there the creature followed me. It was unclothed. When I looked into its eyes beyond the window, for the first time I felt afraid. Its eyes were cunning, crafty, hard; that it had a living intelligence I could see at once—and so, too, the priest had said. It disappeared shortly after, but as the night wore on, I came gradually to know that I would never leave Vömma alive, that even now the creature was biding its time, waiting to strike at its leisure, to take from me the life essence, the essence of my being, and with this psyche to complete its own being. Such was the power of the creature's thought. . . .

"This morning I saw the thing at a distance. Already I had seen that my boat had been cut away. As it came closer, I saw something horrible. The creature had taken a shape familiar to me, even to its features—yes, Hardie, *the thing had begun to look like me!* When I saw that, there was no longer any doubt in my mind—only my death would release me from the terrible fear which preyed upon me. And my death must result because I had made two mistakes—I had failed in the first place to heed the priest and you, and more bitter, having disregarded all warning, I had neglected to bring with me the stone the priest had given me for my protection; I had left it at my boarding house on the mainland. . . . I am writing because of that stone, and because even now as you read this, this thing in my guise may have met you, conversed with you, may indeed be near you at this moment. And this thing that looks so like me must die, and you must be the emissary of its death. I have written a short note to the landlord of my lodgings on the mainland, telling him where to find the stone, giving him your address; he is to send it to you, and then you must do this for my sake and for all mankind.

"The five-pointed star has great power, an older power than that which created the thing on Vömma. It is a weapon used eons past, when the Elder Gods fought and conquered the hosts of evil for possession of Earth—so the priest has told me. It is a stone impregnated with the power of these Ancient Ones, and may God grant that none of this power has been lost! Somehow you must give this star-stone into the hand of the man who calls himself Warwick. I pray that the stone may reach you, and that the thing on Vömma will make its way in my guise to my home in London, there to meet my friends, for it shall have only as much of my memory as I choose to give it; for indeed, though it take the force that animates the physical mass called Jason Warwick, it cannot take the chambers of my mind unless I so desire. This, too, the

priest warned—had I but listened! And yet, this thing may discover more, should he draw knowledge from you, or Bassett, or anyone who has known me. When the stone touches the man from the islands, then he—deathless, eternal one—he must die, he must return to the ever damned depths from which he first came upon earth. . . . Three souls he must have to give him spiritual substance, the power to escape; two he has had, and even now he is moving upon this hut from the north of the island. I am putting this in a bottle, together with the note to my landlord; some day it must reach you. I pray that the Lofoten fishermen will find it soon, will pick it from the sea before the thing can have got far from Vömma.

"WARWICK."

I LOOKED up at last, my startled incredulity evident on my features.

"But, surely, Sir John," I protested, "this cannot be true!"

He shrugged his shoulders, reached suddenly into his pocket, and disclosed a five-pointed stone in his hand, looking like a star against his palm. It was not very large, not heavy, certainly—that I could see. On it was roughly drawn a smaller pentagon, and within this, a circular thing that looked like an eye. For some reason I had expected some kind of ornament that is really associated with Christianity, but it was nothing even remotely connected with present-day religions that Sir John held in his hand; for the stone, though in all respects like a lifeless thing, gave off a definite atmosphere of incredible age, radiating it as if it were alive. There was, too, a sense of power that seemed to lie in the stone.

"That's the charm," murmured Sir John.

"Then you believe the story?" I asked.

He looked at me a moment before replying. Then he said, "Is there any other solution? Think back—apart from what was your own personal experience, and what happened here tonight—think of the men who were killed. Why, the gardener in Warwickshire was on the estate bordering Warwick's own country place to the south—isn't that suggestive enough? Surely that alone must cast serious doubts upon your incredulity.

"But it isn't only that, Bassett. The story hangs together in all its details. Warwick—the real Warwick—wrote that his memory would not be as thorough in this new shape, or so the priest had warned him, at any rate. Your experience at Selfridge's confirms that—his inability to recognize you, and his questions about me—those questions followed by what happened here tonight. Surely you must see what is going on in the fragmentary mind of the ghastly thing that has come back from Vömma in the shape of poor Warwick's body! It's making an effort to destroy all evidence that Warwick might have put on paper—but it doesn't know about the stone, and we must use that against it in the only hope of destroying it forever.

"That's why I haven't told the police all we know of Sullatt's death—why I've concealed the part this thing has played, because then it would be wary. It could escape them easily, and go elsewhere, and the evil that is in it would still not be crushed. Even supposing Warwick's last letter to be the product of a maddened mind, and the events that happened since his trip to Vömma nothing more than a chain of extraordinary coincidences, it will do no harm to give the stone to the thing we call Warwick."

Still I hesitated.

"Come, Bassett," said Sir John. "You must agree to that."

"Very well," I replied finally. "I agree. We'll face him together when we can get him alone somewhere."

"And I'm afraid that will not be so easily done."

In that Sir John Hardie was correct. The thing that had assumed Warwick's body evaded us, sometimes inexplicably. In the course of the days that followed, two more crimes, this time in widely separated localities, were committed, making Sir John helplessly furious. But the end came more suddenly than either he or I had dared to hope.

THE occasion was Lady Drayton's week-end party, to which she had asked Warwick at the request of Sir John. Our elation knew no bounds when she telephoned to say that Warwick's formal acceptance had just come through. Our sole desire that week-end was to come into contact with the elusive Warwick, and to prove, if possible, the ghastly assumption left as the only plausible solution to the change that had come over him since his return from the Lofoten Islands.

Even then, at the party, it was somehow not easy to meet him. During the first few meals at Drayton Hall, he excused himself; it was as if some subtle knowledge of our design had come to him. But the end was destined to come with surprising suddenness, despite Sir John's mounting fear that Warwick would again evade us.

It was on our last night at Drayton Hall, and Sir John and I were standing alone in the library of the newer wing of the Hall when the door opened softly and Jason Warwick stepped into the room. I swung around. I think I gasped aloud when Warwick's strange, depthless eyes looked darkly into my face. We stood there, I as if hypnotized, staring into eyes that I knew did not belong to the Warwick I had known!

Sir John broke the spell. It was a relief to hear his affable voice saying, "Will you join us, Warwick? Bassett and I were just about to go for liqueurs."

Warwick nodded with some reluctance. "Glad to," he muttered.

We went into the drawing-room, Warwick taking the same loping steps that had first attracted my attention at Selfridge's His movements were less stiff, less jerky than they were at that first surprising encounter. Had everything, after all, been fantasmal—or had his movements changed because of those others that had died so strangely? Yet, as we settled ourselves there in the comfortable chairs, each holding a glass in his hand, I had a momentary impulse to discredit everything I had heard, even everything I had seen, and blurt out the whole improbable story to Warwick. But his strange, cold eyes, boring into us with an unnaturally eager intensity, dispelled any doubts I may have had.

Then something happened.

It came so swiftly that I had hardly time to notice the details. Sir John had drawn from his pocket a pack of cigarettes, and then began going through his clothes for his lighter. Not finding it, and inconvenienced by the pack he held in his hand, he thrust out his hand suddenly to Warwick, murmuring, "Here, hold this a moment, old man."

Instinctively Warwick took the pack of cigarettes. I shall never forget the change that came over him. His face went suddenly gray, and his body seemed to shrivel together in the chair. I saw his hand crumble suddenly away, and in a moment his face fell inward. In not more than one minute, a living thing died, fell together, and vanished—disintegrated before our eyes!

In the air was a sudden nauseating odor, and in the chair where the thing from the islands had been sitting lay the suit he had been wearing, together with a few sparse bones, white as lime and essentially unhuman in their structure—the last vestiges of an ancient body!

A living green flame glowing on the rug at our feet was the star-stone Sir John had given the thing from Vömma in the pack of cigarettes.

"He groped his way out with face tightly bandaged, and I never saw his eyes again."

Cool Air

By H. P. LOVECRAFT

A tale of dark science, and the ghastly mystery that enveloped the Spanish doctor's attempts at artificial refrigeration

YOU ask me to explain why I am afraid of a draft of cool air; why I shiver more than others upon entering a cold room, and seem nauseated and repelled when the chill of evening creeps through the heat of a mild autumn day. There are those who say I respond to cold as others do to a bad odor, and I am the last to deny the impression. What I will do is to relate the most horrible cir-

cumstance I ever encountered, and leave it to you to judge whether or not this forms a suitable explanation of my peculiarity.

It is a mistake to fancy that horror is associated inextricably with darkness, silence, and solitude. I found it in the glare of midafternoon, in the clangor of a metropolis, and in the teeming midst of a shabby and commonplace rooming-house with a prosaic landlady and two stalwart men by my side. In the spring of 1923 I had secured some dreary and unprofitable magazine work in the city of New York; and being unable to pay any substantial rent, began drifting from one cheap boarding establishment to another in search of a room which might combine the qualities of decent cleanliness, endurable furnishings, and very reasonable price. It soon developed that I had only a choice between different evils, but after a time I came upon a house in West Fourteenth Street which disgusted me much less than the others I had sampled.

The place was a four-story mansion of brownstone, dating apparently from the late forties, and fitted with woodwork and marble whose stained and sullied splendor argued a descent from high levels of tasteful opulence. In the rooms, large and lofty, and decorated with impossible paper and ridiculously ornate stucco cornices, there lingered a depressing mustiness and hint of obscure cookery; but the floors were clean, the linen tolerably regular, and the hot water not too often cold or turned off; so that I came to regard it as at least a bearable place to hibernate until one might really live again. The landlady, a slatternly, almost bearded Spanish woman named Herrero, did not annoy me with gossip or with criticisms of the late-burning electric light in my third floor front hall room; and my fellow-lodgers were as quiet and uncommunicative as one might desire, being mostly Spaniards a little above the coarsest and crudest grade. Only the din of street-cars in the thoroughfare below proved a serious annoyance.

I had been there about three weeks when the first odd incident occurred. One evening at about eight I heard a spattering on the floor and became suddenly aware that I had been smelling the pungent odor of ammonia for some time. Looking about, I saw that the ceiling was wet and dripping; the soaking apparently proceeding from a corner on the side toward the street. Anxious to stop the matter at its source, I hastened to the basement to tell the landlady, and was assured by her that the trouble would quickly be set right.

"Doctair Muñoz," she cried as she rushed upstairs ahead of me, "he have speel hees chemicals. He ees too seeck for doctair heemself—seecker and seecker all the time—but he weel not have no othair for help. He ees vairy queer in hees seeckness—all day he take funnee-smelling baths, and he cannot get excite or warm. All hees own housework he do—hees leetle room are full of bottles and machines and he do not work as doctair. But he was great once—my fathair in Barcelona have hear of heem—and only joost now he feex a arm of the plumber that get hurt of sudden. He nevair go out, only on roof, and my boy Esteban he breeng heem hees food and laundry and mediceens and chemicals. My God, the sal-ammoniac that man use for to keep heem cool!"

Mrs. Herrero disappeared up the staircase to the fourth floor, and I returned to my room. The ammonia ceased to drip, and as I cleaned up what had spilled and opened the window for air, I heard the landlady's heavy footsteps above me. Doctor Muñoz I had never heard, save for certain sounds as of some gasoline-driven mechanism; since his step was soft and gentle. I wondered for a moment what the strange affliction of this man might be, and whether his obstinate refusal of outside aid were not the result of a rather

baseless eccentricity. There is, I reflected tritely, an infinite deal of pathos in the state of an eminent person who has come down in the world.

I MIGHT never have known Doctor Muñoz had it not been for the heart attack that suddenly seized me one forenoon as I sat writing in my room. Physicians had told me of the danger of those spells, and I knew there was no time to be lost; so, remembering what the landlady had said about the invalid's help of the injured workman, I dragged myself upstairs and knocked feebly at the door above mine.

My knock was answered in good English by a curious voice some distance to the right, asking my name and business; and these things being stated, there came an opening of the door next to the one I had sought.

A rush of cool air greeted me; and though the day was one of the hottest of late June, I shivered as I crossed the threshold into a large apartment whose rich and tasteful decoration surprized me in this nest of squalor and seediness. A folding couch now filled its diurnal rôle of sofa, and the mahogany furniture, sumptuous hangings, old paintings, and mellow bookshelves all bespoke a gentleman's study rather than a boarding-house bedroom. I now saw that the hall room above mine—the "leetle room" of bottles and machines which Mrs. Herrero had mentioned—was merely the laboratory of the doctor; and that his main living-quarters lay in the spacious adjoining room whose convenient alcoves and large contiguous bathroom permitted him to hide all dressers and obtrusively utilitarian devices. Doctor Muñoz, most certainly, was a man of birth, cultivation, and discrimination.

The figure before me was short but exquisitely proportioned, and clad in somewhat formal dress of perfect fit and cut. A high-bred face of masterful though not arrogant expresion was adorned by a short iron-gray full beard, and an old-fashioned pince-nez shielded the full, dark eyes and surmounted an aquiline nose which gave a Moorish touch to a physiognomy otherwise dominantly Celt-Iberian. Thick, well-trimmed hair that argued the punctual calls of a barber was parted gracefully above a high forehead; and the whole picture was one of striking intelligence and superior blood and breeding.

Nevertheless, as I saw Doctor Muñoz in that blast of cool air, I felt a repugnance which nothing in his aspect could justify. Only his lividly inclined complexion and coldness of touch could have afforded a physical basis for this feeling, and even these things should have been excusable considering the man's known invalidism. It might, too, have been the singular cold that alienated me; for such chilliness was abnormal on so hot a day, and the abnormal always excites aversion, distrust, and fear.

But repugnance was soon forgotten in admiration, for the strange physician's extreme skill at once became manifest despite the ice-coldness and shakiness of his bloodless-looking hands. He clearly understood my needs at a glance, and ministered to them with a master's deftness; the while reassuring me in a finely modulated though oddly hollow and timbreless voice that he was the bitterest of sworn enemies to death, and had sunk his fortune and lost all his friends in a lifetime of bizarre experiment devoted to its bafflement and extirpation. Something of the benevolent fanatic seemed to reside in him, and he rambled on almost garrulously as he sounded my chest and mixed a suitable draft of drugs fetched from the smaller laboratory room. Evidently he found the society of a well-born man a rare novelty in this dingy environment, and was moved to unaccus-

tomed speech as memories of better days surged over him.

His voice, if queer, was at least soothing; and I could not even perceive that he breathed as the fluent sentences rolled urbanely out. He sought to distract my mind from my own seizure by speaking of his theories and experiments; and I remember his tactfully consoling me about my weak heart by insisting that will and consciousness are stronger than organic life itself, so that if a bodily frame be but originally healthy and carefully preserved, it may through a scientific enhancement of these qualities retain a kind of nervous animation despite the most serious impairments, defects, or even absences in the battery of specific organs. He might, he half-jestingly said, some day teach me to live—or at least to possess some kind of conscious existence—without any heart at all! For his part, he was afflicted with a complication of maladies requiring a very exact regimen which included constant cold. Any marked rise in temperature might, if prolonged, affect him fatally; and the frigidity of his habitation—some fifty-five or fifty-six degrees Fahrenheit—was maintained by an absorption system of ammonia cooling, the gasoline engine whose pumps I had often heard in my room below.

Relieved of my seizure in a marvelously short while, I left the shivery place a disciple and devotee of the gifted recluse. After that I paid him frequent overcoated calls, listening while he told of secret researches and almost ghastly results, and trembling a bit when I examined the unconventional and astonishingly ancient volumes on his shelves. I was eventually, I may add, almost cured of my disease for all time by his skilful ministrations. It seems that he did not scorn the incantations of the mediævalists, since he believed these cryptic formulæ to contain rare psychological stimuli which might conceivably have singular effects on the substance of a nervous system from which organic pulsations had fled. I was touched by his account of the aged Doctor Torres of Valencia, who had shared his earlier experiments and nursed him through the great illness of eighteen years before, whence his present disorders proceeded. No sooner had the venerable practitioner saved his colleague than he himself succumbed to the grim enemy he had fought. Perhaps the strain had been too great; for Doctor Muñoz made it whisperingly clear—though not in detail—that the methods of healing had been most extraordinary, involving scenes and processes not welcomed by elderly and conservative Galens.

AS THE weeks passed, I observed with regret that my new friend was indeed slowly but unmistakably losing ground physically, as Mrs. Herrero had suggested. The livid aspect of his countenance was intensified, his voice became more hollow and indistinct, his muscular motions were less perfectly coördinated, and his mind and will displayed less resilience and initiative. Of this sad change he seemed by no means unaware, and little by little his expression and conversation both took on a gruesome irony which restored in me something of the subtle repulsion I had originally felt.

He developed strange caprices, acquiring a fondness for exotic spices and Egyptian incense until his room smelled like the vault of a sepulchered Pharaoh in the Valley of Kings. At the same time, his demands for cold air increased, and with my aid he amplified the ammonia piping of his room and modified the pumps and feed of his refrigerating machine until he could keep the temperature as low as thirty-four or forty degrees, and finally even twenty-eight degrees; the bathroom and laboratory, of course, being less chilled, in order that water might not freeze, and that chemical processes might not be impeded.

The tenant adjoining him complained of the icy air from around the connecting door; so I helped him fit heavy hangings to obviate the difficulty. A kind of growing horror, of outré and morbid cast, seemed to possess him. He talked of death incessantly, but laughed hollowly when such things as burial or funeral arrangements were gently suggested.

All in all, he became a disconcerting and even gruesome companion; yet in my gratitude for his healing, I could not well abandon him to the strangers around him, and was careful to dust his room and attend to his needs each day, muffled in a heavy ulster which I bought especially for the purpose. I likewise did much of his shopping, and gasped in bafflement at some of the chemicals he ordered from druggists and laboratory supply houses.

An increasing and unexplained atmosphere of panic seemed to rise around his apartment. The whole house, as I have said, had a musty odor; but the smell in his room was worse, in spite of all the spices and incense, and the pungent chemicals of the now incessant baths which he insisted on taking unaided. I perceived that it must be connected with his ailment, and shuddered when I reflected on what that ailment might be. Mrs. Herrero crossed herself when she looked at him, and gave him up unreservedly to me; not even letting her son Esteban continue to run errands for him. When I suggested other physicians, the sufferer would fly into as much of a rage as he seemed to dare to entertain. He evidently feared the physical effect of violent emotion, yet his will and driving force waxed rather than waned, and he refused to be confined to his bed. The lassitude of his earlier ill days gave place to a return of his fiery purpose, so that he seemed about to hurl defiance at the death-demon even as that ancient enemy seized him. The pretense of eating, always curiously like a formality with him, he virtually abandoned; and mental power alone appeared to keep him from total collapse.

He acquired a habit of writing long documents of some sort, which he carefully sealed and filed with injunctions that I transmit them after his death to certain persons whom he named—for the most part lettered East Indians, but including also a once celebrated French physician now generally thought dead, and about whom the most inconceivable things had been whispered. As it happened, I burned all these papers undelivered and unopened. His aspect and voice became utterly frightful, and his presence almost unbearable. One September day an unexpected glimpse of him induced an epileptic fit in a man who had come to repair his electric desk lamp; a fit for which he prescribed effectively while keeping himself well out of sight. That man, oddly enough, had been through the terrors of the great war without having incurred any fright so thorough.

THEN, in the middle of October, the horror of horrors came with stupefying suddenness. One night about eleven the pump of the refrigerating machine broke down, so that within three hours the process of ammonia cooling became impossible. Doctor Muñoz summoned me by thumping on the floor, and I worked desperately to repair the injury while my host cursed in a tone whose lifeless, rattling hollowness surpassed description. My amateur efforts, however, proved of no use; and when I had brought in a mechanic from a neighboring all-night garage we learned that nothing could be done until morning, when a new piston would have to be obtained. The moribund hermit's rage and fear, swelling to grotesque proportions, seemed likely to shatter what remained of his failing physique; and once a spasm caused him to clap his hands to

his eyes and rush into the bathroom. He groped his way out with face tightly bandaged, and I never saw his eyes again.

The frigidity of the apartment was now sensibly diminishing, and at about five in the morning, the doctor retired to the bathroom, commanding me to keep him supplied with all the ice I could obtain at all-night drugstores and cafeterias. As I would return from my sometimes discouraging trips and lay my spoils before the closed bathroom door, I could hear a restless splashing within, and a thick voice croaking out the order for "More—more!" At length a warm day broke, and the shops opened one by one. I asked Esteban either to help with the ice-fetching while I obtained the pump piston, or to order the piston while I continued with the ice; but, instructed by his mother, he absolutely refused.

Finally I hired a seedy-looking loafer whom I encountered on the corner of Eighth Avenue to keep the patient supplied with ice from a little shop where I introduced him, and applied myself diligently to the task of finding a pump piston and engaging workmen competent to install it. The task seemed interminable, and I raged almost as violently as the hermit when I saw the hours slipping by in a breathless, foodless round of vain telephoning, and a hectic quest from place to place, hither and thither by subway and surface car.

About noon I encountered a suitable supply house far downtown, and at approximately one-thirty that afternoon arrived at my boarding-place with the necessary paraphernalia and two sturdy and intelligent mechanics. I had done all I could, and hoped I was in time.

Black terror, however, had preceded me. The house was in utter turmoil, and above the chatter of awed voices I heard a man praying in a deep basso. Fiendish things were in the air, and lodgers told over the beads of their rosaries as they caught the odor from beneath the doctor's closed door. The lounger I had hired, it seems, had fled screaming and mad-eyed not long after his second delivery of ice: perhaps as a result of excessive curiosity. He could not, of course, have locked the door behind him; yet it was now fastened, presumably from the inside. There was no sound within save a nameless sort of slow, thick dripping.

Briefly consulting with Mrs. Herrero and the workmen despite a fear that gnawed my inmost soul, I advised the breaking down of the door; but the landlady found a way to turn the key from the outside with some wire device. We had previously opened the doors of all the other rooms on that hall, and flung all the windows to the very top. Now, noses protected by handkerchiefs, we tremblingly invaded the accursed south room, which blazed with the warm sun of early afternoon.

A kind of dark, slimy trail led from the open bathroom door to the hall door, and thence to the desk, where a terrible little pool had accumulated. Something was scrawled there in a pencil in an awful, blind hand on a piece of paper hideously smeared as though by the very claws that traced the hurried last words. Then the trail led to the couch and ended unutterably.

What was, or had been, on the couch I cannot and dare not say here. But this is what I shiveringly puzzled out on the stickily smeared paper before I drew a match and burned it to a crisp; what I puzzled out in terror as the landlady and two mechanics rushed frantically from that hellish place to babble their incoherent stories at the nearest police station. The nauseous words seemed well-nigh incredible in that yellow sunlight, with the clatter of cars and motor trucks ascending clamorously from crowded Fourteenth Street, yet

I confess that I believed them then. Whether I believe them now I honestly do not know. There are things about which it is better not to speculate, and all that I can say is that I hate the smell of ammonia, and grow faint at a draft of unusually cool air.

"The end," ran that noisome scrawl, "is here. No more ice—the man looked and ran away. Warmer every minute, and the tissues can't last. I fancy you know—what I said about the will and the nerves and the preserved body after the organs ceased to work. It was good theory, but couldn't keep up indefinitely. There was a gradual deterioration I had not foreseen. Doctor Torres knew, but the shock killed him. He couldn't stand what he had to do; he had to get me in a strange, dark place, when he minded my letter and nursed me back. And the organs never would work again. It had to be done my way—artificial preservation—*for you see I died that time eighteen years ago.*"

This Month's Cover

The cover design was painted by the brilliant young American artist, Virgil Finlay. It illustrates the most famous of weird poetry classics, *The Raven,* by Edgar Allan Poe, with its dramatic climax:

"Be that word our sign of parting, bird or fiend!" I shrieked, upstarting—

"Get thee back into the tempest and the Night's Plutonian shore!

Leave no black plume as a token of that lie thy soul hath spoken!

Leave my loneliness unbroken!—quit the bust above my door!

Take thy beak from out my heart, and take thy form from off my door!"

Quoth the Raven, "Nevermore."

A Night in Malneant

By CLARK ASHTON SMITH

An exquisite weird fantasy about the death of the lady Mariel

MY SOJOURN in the city of Malnéant occurred during a period of my life no less dim and dubious than that city itself and the misty regions lying thereabout. I have no precise recollection of its locality, nor can I remember exactly when and how I came to visit it. But I had heard vaguely that such a place was situated along my route; and when I came to the fog-enfolded river that flows beside its walls, and heard beyond the river the mortuary tolling of many bells, I surmised that I was approaching Malnéant.

On reaching the gray, colossal bridge that crosses the river, I could have continued at will on other roads leading to remoter cities: but it seemed to me that I might as well enter Malnéant as any other place. And so it was that I set foot on the bridge of shadowy arches, under which the black waters flowed in stealthy division and were joined again in a silence as of Styx and Acheron.

That period of my life, I have said, was dim and dubious: all the more so, mayhap, because of my need for forgetfulness, my persistent and at times partially rewarded search for oblivion. And that which I needed to forget above all was the death of the lady Mariel, and the fact that I myself had slain her as surely as if I had done the deed with my own hand. For she had loved me with an affection deeper and purer and more stable than mine; and my changeable temper, my fits of cruel indifference or ferocious irritability, had broken her gentle heart. So it was that she had sought the anodyne of a lethal poison; and after she was laid to rest in the somber vaults of her ancestors, I had become a wanderer, followed and forever tortured by a belated remorse. For months, or years, I am uncertain which, I roamed from old-world city to city, heeding little where I went if only wine and the other agents of oblivion were available. . . . And thus I came, somewhile in my indefinite journeying, to the dim environs of Malnéant.

The sun (if ever there was a sun above this region) had been lost for I knew not how long in a sky of leaden vapors; the day was drear and sullen at best. But now, by the thickening of the shadows and the mist, I felt that evening must be near; and the bells I had heard, however heavy and sepulchral their tolling, gave at least the assurance of prospective shelter for the night. So I crossed the long bridge and entered the grimly yawning gate with a quickening of my footsteps even if with no alacrity of spirit.

The dusk had gathered behind the gray walls, but there were few lights in the city. Few people were abroad, and these went upon their way with a sort of solemn haste, as if on some funereal errand that would admit of no delay. The streets were narrow, the houses high, with overhanging balconies and heavily curtained or shuttered windows. All was very silent, except for the bells, which tolled recurrently, sometimes faint and far off, and sometimes with a loud and startling clang-

or that seemed to come almost from overhead.

As I plunged among the shadowy mansions, along the streets from which a visible twilight issued to envelop me, it seemed that I was going farther and farther away from my memories at every step. For this reason I did not at once inquire my way to a tavern but was content to lose myself more and more in the gray labyrinth of buildings, which grew vaguer and vaguer amid the ever-mounting darkness and fog, as if they were about to dissolve in oblivion.

I think that my soul would have been almost at peace with itself, if it had not been for the reiterant ringing of the bells, which were like all bells that toll for the repose of the dead, and therefore set me to remembering those that had rung for Mariel. But whenever they ceased, my thoughts would drift back with an indolent ease, a recovered security, to the all-surrounding vagueness. . . .

I HAVE no idea how far I had gone in Malnéant, nor how long I had roamed among those houses that hardly seemed as if they could be peopled by any but the sleeping or the dead. At last, however, I became aware that I was very tired, and bethought me of food and wine and a lodging for the night. But nowhere in my wanderings had I noticed the sign-board of an inn; so I resolved to ask the next passer-by for the desired direction.

As I have said before, there were few people abroad. Now, when I made up my mind to address one of them, it appeared that there was no one at all; and I walked onward through street after street in my futile search for a living face.

At length I met two women, clothed in gray that was cold and dim as the folds of the fog, and veiled withal, who were hurrying along with the same funereal intentness I had perceived in all other denizens of that city. I made bold to accost them, asking if they could direct me to an inn.

Scarcely pausing or even turning their heads, they answered: "We cannot tell you. We are shroud-weavers, and we have been busy making a shroud for the lady Mariel."

Now, at that name, which of all names in the world was the one I should least have expected or cared to hear, an unspeakable chill invaded my heart, and a dreadful dismay smote me like the breath of the tomb. It was indeed strange that in this dim city, so far in time and space from all I had fled to escape, a woman should have recently died who was also named Mariel. The coincidence appeared so sinsister, that an odd fear of the streets through which I had wandered was born suddenly in my soul. The name had evoked, with a more irrevocable fatality than the tolling of the bells, all that I had vainly wished to forget; and my memories were like living coals in my heart.

As I went onward, with paces that had become more hurried, more feverish than those of the people of Malnéant, I met two men, who were likewise dressed from head to foot in gray; and I asked of them the same question I had asked of the shroud-weavers.

"We cannot tell you," they replied. "We are coffin-makers, and we have been busy making a coffin for the lady Mariel."

As they spoke, and hastened on, the bells rang out again, this time very near at hand, with a more dismal and sepulchral menace in their leaden tolling. And everything about me, the tall and misty houses, the dark, indefinite streets, the rare and wraith-like figures, became as if part of the obscure confusion and fear and bafflement of a nightmare. Moment by moment, the coincidence on which I had stumbled appeared all too bizarre for belief, and I was

troubled now by the monstrous and absurd idea that the Mariel I knew had only just died, and that this fantastic city was in some unsurmisable manner connected with her death. But this, of course, my reason rejected summarily, and I kept repeating to myself: "The Mariel of whom they speak is another Mariel." And it irritated me beyond all measure that a thought so enormous and ludicrous should return when my logic had dismissed it.

I met no more people of whom to inquire my way. But at length, as I fought with my shadowy perplexity and my burning memories, I found that I had paused beneath the weather-beaten sign of an inn, on which the lettering had been half effaced by time and the brown lichens. The building was obviously very old, like all the houses in Malnéant; its upper stories were lost in the swirling fog, except for a few furtive lights that glowed obscurely down; and a vague and musty odor of antiquity came forth to greet me as I mounted the steps and tried to open the ponderous door. But the door had been locked or bolted; so I began to pound upon it with my fists to attract the attention of those within.

After much delay, the door was opened slowly and grudgingly, and a cadaverous-looking individual peered forth, frowning with portentous gravity as he saw me.

"What do you desire?" he queried, in tones that were both brusk and solemn.

"A room for the night, and wine," I requested.

"We cannot accommodate you. All the rooms are occupied by people who have come to attend the obsequies of the lady Mariel; and all the wine in the house has been requisitioned for their use. You will have to go elsewhere."

He closed the door quickly upon me with the last words.

I turned to resume my wanderings, and all that had troubled me before was now intensified a hundredfold. The gray mists and the grayer houses were full of the menace of memory: they were like traitorous tombs from which the cadavers of dead hours poured forth to assail me with envenomed fangs and talons. I cursed the hour when I had entered Malnéant, for it seemed to me now that in so doing I had merely completed a funereal, sinister circle through time, and had returned to the day of Mariel's death. And certainly, all my recollections of Mariel, of her final agony and her entombment, had assumed the frightful vitality of present things. But my reason still maintained, of course, that the Mariel who lay dead somewhere in Malnéant, and for whom all these obsequial preparations were being made, was not the lady whom I had loved, but another.

After threading streets that were even darker and narrower than those before traversed, I found a second inn, bearing a similar weather-beaten sign, and in all other respects very much like the first. The door was barred, and I knocked thereon with trepidation and was in no manner surprised when a second individual with a cadaverous face informed me in tones of mortuary solemnity:

"We cannot accommodate you. All the rooms have been taken by musicians and mourners who will serve at the obsequies of the lady Mariel; and all the wine has been reserved for their use."

Now I began to dread the city about me with a manifold fear: for apparently the whole business of the people in Malnéant consisted of preparations for the funeral of this lady Mariel. And it began to be obvious that I must walk the streets of the city all night because of these same preparations. All at once, an overwhelming weariness was mingled with my nightmare terror and perplexity.

I had not long continued my peregrinations, after leaving the second inn, when

the bells were tolled once more. For the first time, I found it possible to identify their source: they were in the spires of a great cathedral which loomed immediately before me through the fog. Some people were entering the cathedral, and a curiosity, which I knew to be both morbid and perilous, prompted me to follow them. Here, I somehow felt, I should be able to learn more regarding the mystery that tormented me.

All was dim within, and the light of many tapers scarcely served to illumine the vast nave and altar. Masses were being said by priests in black whose faces I could not see distinctly; and to me, their chanting was like words in a dream; and I could hear nothing, and nothing was plainly visible in all the place, except a bier of opulent fabrics on which there lay a motionless form in white. Flowers of many hues had been strewn upon the bier, and their fragrance filled the air with a drowsy languor, with an anodyne that seemed to drug my heart and brain. Such flowers had been cast on the bier of Mariel; and even thus, at her funeral, I had been overcome by a momentary dulling of the senses because of their perfume.

Dimly I became aware that someone was at my elbow. With eyes still intent on the bier, I asked:

"Who is it that lies yonder, for whom these masses are being said and these bells are rung?"" And a slow, sepulchral voice replied:

"It is the lady Mariel, who died yesterday and who will be interred tomorrow in the vaults of her ancestors. If you wish, you may go forward and gaze upon her."

So I went down the cathedral aisle, even to the side of the bier, whose opulent fabrics trailed on the cold flags. And the face of her who lay thereon, with a tranquil smile upon the lips, and tender shadows upon the shut eyelids, was the face of the Mariel I had loved and of none other. The tides of time were frozen in their flowing; and all that was or had been or could be, all of the world that existed aside from her, became as fading shadows; and even as once before (was it eons or instants ago?) my soul was locked in the marble hell of its supreme grief and regret. I could not move, I could not cry out nor even weep, for my very tears were turned to ice. And now I knew with a terrible certitude that this one event, the death of the lady Mariel, had drawn apart from all other happenings, had broken away from the sequences of time and had found for itself a setting of appropriate gloom and solemnity; or perhaps had even built around itself the whole enormous maze of that spectral city, in which to abide my destined return among the mists of a deceptive oblivion.

At length, with an awful effort of will, I turned my eyes away; and leaving the cathedral with steps that were both hurried and leaden, I sought to find an egress from the dismal labyrinth of Malnéant to the gate by which I had entered. But this was by no means easy, and I must have roamed for hours in alleys blind and stifling as tombs, and along the tortuous, self-reverting thoroughfares, ere I came to a familiar street and was able henceforward to direct my paces with something of surety. And a dull and sunless daylight was dawning behind the mists when I crossed the bridge and came again to the road that would lead me away from that fatal city.

. . .

SINCE then, I have wandered long and in many places. But never again have I cared to revisit those old-world realms of fog and mist, for fear that I should come once more to Malnéant, and find that its people are still busied with their preparations for the obsequies of the lady Mariel.

Gray Ghouls

By BASSETT MORGAN

WHEN there was a job to be done, especially adventurous, entailing skilful diplomacy and undoubted peril, Tom Mansey was summoned partly because he knew Papua as well as a white man may, partly that he seemed indifferent to probable torture and death meted out by head-hunting savages to intruders in hidden empires of the hinterland.

The stout official sat about a table viewing evidence which had promulgated fresh indignation. It had been seized from the trophies of a globe-trotting curio-hunter who parted reluctantly, indignantly from it, and spouted wrath and threats of reprisal. It was a mummied human head no larger than a man's doubled fist, beautifully cured, furnished with balls of cat's-eye chalcedony in the sockets, lips sewn in a kissing pout. The shocking feature was its abundant and flaming red hair. Nowhere in Papua is red hair natural to a native. The idea of a mummied head with ruddy locks threatened the fragile foothold of white civilization on those dark flanks of a land as treacherous as the panther it most resembles.

Mansey added the final note of nausea to the assemblage.

"A woman's head, I should say. Whether a white woman or not I don't know. The curing might brown the skin. This hair is silky, rather fine and waved, certainly not bleached. By the manner of lip-sewing I should say it comes from the north-shore people. I never saw nicer work."

It was uncanny, horrid, weird, to hear him enthuse over the craft of cannibalistic savages, but his remarks were crisp when they asked him to investigate the source of supply, take feasible measures to halt barter in heads, intimate to the most indomitable, hellishly cunning race of blacks the earth endures, that selling human heads to tourists was indelicate, inadvisable and immoral.

"I'd suggest right here that you'd better stop tourists buying heads. So long as they pay big money for them, the heads will be forthcoming, and since heads with Nordic-colored hair bring fatter prices, the

* From WEIRD TALES for July, 1927.

natives will swoop down on the ports and clean out our little intrusion of white exploiters in one whirlwind of savagery run amuck. However, I'm interested. Using cat's-eye quartz for eyes is a new wrinkle that shows intelligent progress in art."

Mansey crossed the room in a weighted silence and traced a forefinger on a wall-map, traversing from the Curlews south of Sarong, then to the great island of Papua marked on the north New Guinea.

"What white men or women have gone into here in the last decade and who's missing?" he asked of the company's clerk who had said least and done most to assist in the investigation. The clerk flipped pages of a book and wrote rapidly on slips of paper which he gave to Mansey.

With these data, Mansey set out with a power launch and a flock of Tonga boys in small outrigger proas hollowed from hardwood in a manner that has not changed since the sea spewed forth the South Sea Islands. Mansey was lightly armed. Weapons are small insurance against the peril of penetrating tribal villages of treacherous Papuasian black men, and he knew that where that ruddy-haired head was cured and fitted with quartz eyes, were intelligence and barbed cunning.

He had little information on which to base conjecture. Official files mentioned a Scotchman, Andrew Keith, who had gone native thirty years before, taken to the hinterland and never reappeared. Besides Andrew Keith, one other white man was in that locality to which Mansey was bound. His name was Homer Mullet; he had been a surgeon in London, got into disrepute and after a brief attempt to establish himself in Port Moresby, went north, evidently had luck with the natives and sent down frequently for drugs of surgical nature and new cases of instruments. His latest order was not more than six months old. With this meager information on possible sources of red hair Tom Mansey navigated the treacherous tide rips and cross currents and after weeks of tentative questioning located the lagoon where Homer Mullet was reported to have established himself as a sorcerer of greater magic than any native chieftain.

LEAVING his Tonga boys and their proas outside, Mansey and a native launch man entered the reef jaws of white coral just when dawn turned the world pearl and the sea was shimmering opal. Across the lagoon were the triangular huts fringed with tinkling shells, a fire burning on the beach, cooking-pots steaming over it and the flower-decorated savages who shouted yowls of welcome. His launch churned bubbles in water clear as air, shining like green flame. Beneath were sea-gardens indescribably beautiful and menacing, tinted coral, waving fern weeds, wide-open flanges of tridacnas that can take off a man's foot if he steps into one, pretty little fish clustering and scattering like particles of an exploding glass ball. The air was hot and moist, perfumed by flowers, thick with the stench of rotting river swamp, pungent with sea-tang, the mingled scents of Papua's breasts teeming with desire, unforgettable as the hells it transcended.

With a feeling of high adventure, Mansey sent the launch close to a crude causeway jutting between the nipa-thatched huts, knowing the yelps of painted, spear-pronged savages might change at a breath to cries of blood-lust and battle. His heart pounded with the spice of the thing and another discovery. Sitting in state near the fire, remaining seated while the savages danced and leaped in childlike frenzy, was the white man he sought.

A dozen black hands reached to help him to the landing-stage. The center of a swarm of rowdy young warriors hideously glorious in necklaces of human knuckle-bones, shark's teeth, crests of Paradise

plumes, he was led to the fire and an avenue cleared down which he walked to the white man who was distinctly unornamented except by flower garlands, a collar of many strands of pearls, and pearl strings looped to his midriff.

"I'm Tom Mansey," he said, "and I suppose your name is Homer Mullet. I've been a month or two finding you to have a little talk."

"Mansey," commented Mullet without rising or offering his hand; "seems to me I've seen your name on the company's notations. Sit in for breakfast and make yourself comfortable. I'm pretty chief here, and as long as we agree you can sleep easy. There's turtle stewing and they've learned to cook it white-man fashion. It's good to hear English again. You haven't by any possibility some recent gramophone records, have you?"

Mansey had. He breakfasted on scraped coconut cream and turtle stew, a little fruit and remarkably good coffee and was patient while Mullet pumped and probed him for world news and port gossip.

He and Mullet ate alone. The crowd had dispersed to a farther fire and cooking-pot. The women were invisible in the huts. Mansey had opportunity to observe many things, a garden of sorts for that wilderness, an almost new *lagi-lagi* house for the men, and that Mullet's abundant hair curled to his shoulders but was so dark brown as to be almost black. Otherwise the renegade surgeon was a giant in stature, growing too fat and slightly insane, which Mansey expected. No white man can fight Papua. The land gets under his skull and behind his eyes. It drugs and stultifies his morale and finally kills his soul. That had evidently happened to Mullet. But his talk was rational. Mansey saw the slender, tapering fingers always playing nervously with the pearl strands, and the shifting prominent eyes. He had been a man of character and personality, a brainy intelligence, sensual-mouthed, and his good looks spoiled by a flattened nose and indulgence which over-hampered his body.

"You'll stay a few days?" he asked.

"I'd like to," Mansey told him.

"You can have a house. Anything else?" Mullet's smile was suggestive and Mansey shook his head.

"The fact is I came for your help in halting the sale of heads to white tourists, if possible." Mansey told in detail the new menace which had leaped to formidable proportions and of the one ruddy-haired head which had started the rumpus.

"So you know something of heads," said Mullet, "recognized the lip-sewing and came north. They know that I'm here, and that Sandy Keith left his red-headed offspring in these hills, eh?"

"I suspected something of the sort. I suspected you."

This man was clever, also friendly. Mansey wanted that amiable feeling to continue and he had no hope of fooling Homer Mullet about his mission. Frankness might serve where guile would antagonize.

"You flatter me," said Mullet, laughing. "I start no line of devils down here, my friend. Besides, my hair isn't red."

"But the heads——" began Mansey. Mullet silenced him.

"I've no doubt my fellows do trade heads. They cure them. I can't stop that, but I have managed to put the fear o' God into them enough to confine their head-gathering to enemies and killing them outright before they begin. One thing I'll admit: there isn't a fresh one in the village. Look at the houses."

They strolled abroad and Mansey saw that the heads on display were old, rather green and misted with mold. Wooden figures carved grotesquely were plentiful. The village was clean, the houses new, there was evidence of sanitation and order unusual to natives. Yet instinct told Tom Mansey he was hot on the trail of trouble.

He was sure of it when at one hut there was a commotion and he saw a young girl struggling with older women and caught a glimpse of a head of glinting gold curled in cloudy beauty. Then amid shrieks of the women she was dragged inside and hidden. Mullet laughed.

"Bleaching a new queen," he observed. "At present I am a widower after a fashion. That shock you?"

"No." Mansey shook his head. "It isn't good for man to live alone, especially in savage lands. That new queen is a beauty."

"Six weeks in a darkened hut bleaches them like mellow ivory, and she's been kept from betel-chewing, or having her teeth filed. Making wives to order is feasible here, Mansey. Old Sandy Keith knew that."

"He is dead?" asked Mansey quickly.

"He is dead, and I inherited a lot of his troubles along with his trained apes. Sandy was quite a scientist. He was bent on learning the language of orang-outangs and had a flock of them. I have them now, nicely trained. You'll see."

Mansey was relieved at the conversational change, and puzzled. The orang-outang is a formidable simian, and he knew little about them except that they would clear the jungle in their vicinity of smaller monkeys and birds on sight. Mullet's laugh was unpleasant, yet Mansey fancied it sounded strange because laughter was not often loosed in that place. He sensed a sinister secret behind this bland talk of Mullet, and he knew instinctively that he was being entertained nicely to hide that secret, as well as Mullet's almost pathetic joy in companionship of his own race and kind.

THAT night he watched a dance at the *lagi-lagi* house and the ritual of initiation of young men ripe for manhood—the ritual that would enable them to take wives and heads. It was not new to Mansey, but he hated the evident relish of Homer Mullet over the stoicism of young men enduring greatly. He watched through a haze the final orgy, until satiated with strong drink and blood-lust they finally dropped inert and lay like a strange harvest of death as dawn flowed over the hills and blazed on the sea.

He went to the hut they had given him, but did not sleep. The settlement was lifeless at that hour except for a few older women at their housekeeping and cooking. He thought of the girl in the bleaching-hut who would be Mullet's queen, and was sorry for her, needlessly. He remembered that Mullet had said he was a widower at present, and during the dance in the *lagi-lagi* house he had confided drunken details of his rule and the reign of Sandy Keith.

"He lorded it, Mansey. Had several wives, and I married one of his daughters, a red-headed she-devil. She had all the beauty you'd ever find in a woman, but she was worse than native. She tried to kill me a dozen times—knives, poison, sorcery, until——"

Mullet had laughed horridly. Tom Mansey had no doubt in the world that the red-headed wife of Homer Mullet was killed, probably murdered. It was not his concern, but it sickened him. He knew that he was on the track of that forbidden traffic in heads, yet no nearer a solution of the puzzle would be presented if he tried to halt it.

That day he slept fitfully and awoke after the noon heat to find Homer Mullet astir.

Hearing his voice, Mansey looked from the hut door and saw Mullet coming down the trail of white crushed coral followed closely by a huge gray shape that loped along in the way of the great apes, paws trailing at its knees, and Mullet was talking to the creature, which seemingly answered by uncouth guttural sounds.

He hailed Mansey. "Going to take a look-see at my queen. Come along?"

It seemed diplomatic to go along and Mansey came down the notched log a little on guard because of the great ape.

"Sheba won't bother you," said Homer Mullet. "She's jealous of women but not men. I've got to get her acquainted with this girl, whom, by the way, I've named Cleo, short of Cleopatra." Mullet enjoyed the joke loudly, and the great ape showed her big teeth in a wide-mouthed grin and an uncanny cackle.

"Shut up!" yelped Mullet. The effect was magical. The ape's eyes showed shame, even grief, and she hung her head, but when Mansey looked back he thought she was snarling.

When they reached the hut where the potential queen was being bleached and beautified, Sheba the ape suddenly darted and swung to its roof-peak, and no commands of Mullet would make her descend.

"All right, you jealous old she-monk, take a look-see from up there and you'll see a real beauty. Bring out the girl!" he called to the scrawny old woman who peeped from the door.

On the roof, Sheba chattered angrily as Mullet repeated the command in native. To Mansey the experiment seemed considerable of a risk. As the child appeared in the hut doorway, Sheba showed jealousy. The girl was the prettiest Mansey had ever seen, her rounded body outlined in scarlet stain, her only covering a waist fringe of red and white blossoms.

Homer Mullet glanced at her, then beckoned to the ape on the hut roof and commanded in lurid curses, which Sheba not only ignored but chattered back her raging resentment.

"Look here," howled Mullet, "you'll come down and behave or I'll get the whip. This girl is your master-lady, hear what I say? You'll treat her nicely and none of your tricks like last time. You had your chance, you she-devil! And you made hell for everybody. You know what happened to you then, and it'll be worse next time. I'll make a crocodile of you—understand? You know how you hate water and the muggers. Well, you behave or your next incarnation will be a mugger. Now come down and kowtow."

Mansey listened in astonishment and something of fear. The she-ape was powerful enough to tear a man limb from limb, and she was roused to fury. Her eyes shot green fire, her teeth flashed and ground on themselves. The pretty little bride was gray-skinned with terror and dropped to the ground, her golden eyes a wild appeal. Mullet had been drinking heavily all night and was still drunk. His face grew purple-red, his eyes were bloodshot, the veins on his neck stood out and throbbed. But the ape defied him and in the end he snarled a command to take the girl inside, and strode off beckoning Mansey to follow to a couch by a shaded nook at the jungle edge.

There he imbibed more fermented cocoanut juice and gradually calmed to coherency which was no less frightful in its revelations than his exhibition of rage.

"That ape is near human. I'd say she *is* human. Old Keith made a study of them. I went him one better. I gave them brains. You saw that she was jealous, didn't you? Well, I'm afraid of her. Six months ago she killed my bride, another red-headed beauty like this one. I've got to prevent that, Mansey. Somehow I've got to keep her from this girl."

"Why not do away with the ape?" asked Mansey, more because some reply was expected than as a suggestion.

"I dare not. I've got seven of them trained, equipped with brains—thinking brains. They're my bodyguard. Without them I wouldn't last here. Oh, I know these blacks don't love me! I'm not that great a fool that I'd feel safe long. The

she-apes are always near. You don't see them, but they don't let me out of their sight. I made a mistake with Sheba, though. Sheba was the name of that red-haired she-devil of a wife that tried to do me in. I remember telling you about her last night. Well, Sheba loved her red hair and beauty. She loved me too damn well. And God, how she hates being a monkey! But that was no idle threat about the muggers. I've never tried that, but I will. I'll make a crocodile of Sheba, so help me God, if she touches this new girl."

"Mullet, you're about as drunk as I've seen a man. Better quit that stuff or you'll be seeing monkeys," said Mansey.

Homer Mullet laughed long and loud.

"You don't believe that, eh? Well, I don't blame you. But didn't you hear what they did for me in London? No? Well, I'll tell you. I took the brain of a boy dying with consumption and transplanted it to the head of a half-wit homicide. And by God, I made a success of it! And did they hail me as the discoverer of a new trail in surgery, and see as I saw, a way to empty our asylums and make use of incurables? They did not. They said I was crazy, they disgraced me. I barely escaped an asylum myself. That's why I came out here and kept my hand in. And I've done it time and time again. There was plenty of opportunity. The battles gave me subjects for experiment, and many a head is mummied and sold whose brain is still doing excellent service in a strange body. That's what I've done."

Mansey was staring at Mullet the surgeon, who gloated over his own skill. It was unbelievable, yet except the wrath which shone in his eyes, Mullet's appearance was convincing.

"But trying the ape business was new. And possibly it was immoral. Sheba tried so many times to kill me, and one night when I was sleeping she almost got me. I struck in self-defense, stunned her and saw myself as a murderer. You may think murder a small thing to a man like me. It isn't. I've never killed. I didn't kill then. The she-ape that Keith had trained and which liked me was tearing the hut to pieces when she heard the row inside, and before I could get a gun she had snatched the body of my insensible Sheba. You won't care for details of what happened. I hadn't a weapon and I grabbed a bottle of chloroform which was handy and tried to brain the ape. The bottle broke and she was deluged. It acts quickly on them, Mansey. And something seemed to crack in my brain as I saw the unconscious ape and the dying woman. Well, the ape is Sheba. Now you know. I'm a fool not to kill her, but it's gone farther than that with me. I liked Sheba. And she cared enough for me to prevent my ever taking a second wife. More than that, she has somehow communicated to the other orang-outangs her jealous guardianship.

"I can't slaughter all the apes in the jungle, and they haunt me. Sheba has managed to people the land with gray ghouls who watch me night and day. Dante never conceived the hell of torture that I'm living through, Mansey."

IN THE tropic heat, Homer Mullet shivered and sweat broke cold on the forehead of Tom Mansey. Through terrific repulsion overwhelming him, he found himself sorry for the man who had made his own hell with more ingenious cunning than cannibal head-hunters could have devised for him.

"Mansey, if you could tell me a way out, I'd hang these pearls on your arm. An emperor's ransom, Mansey, for a plan to rid myself of this hell and live in peace."

Mansey was silent. The avalanche of horror had come so suddenly he could not yet grasp the thing. He assured himself it was the talk of a maniac, wildly horrible,

yet in spite of reason he was convinced. And sifting through the horror was the fact of those red-haired heads drifting down to be bartered. If what Mullet said should be true, he was no nearer accomplishing what he had come to do. The authorities would not believe this tale nor could he halt the barter and trade.

"What became of the—the head—of Sheba?" he asked, licking dry lips with the tip of his tongue.

"They stole it from me. And I had made a job of that head, was rolling drunk when I did most of it. I put eyes——"

"Cat's-eye quartz?" asked Mansey. Mullet nodded.

"I've got it in the boat," said Mansey. "That was the one that caused the trouble. It was nicely finished."

Mullet stared at him.

"For God's sake, hide it, Mansey. Perhaps Sheba——"

He did not finish, for swinging down from tree branches overhead, the great she-ape stood before them.

Mullet ripped out an oath and added, "You heard what I was saying, you——"

Mansey fancied he heard the sound of a guttural word of speech and he leaped to his feet, ready to run for cover. The ape regarded him a moment with her alert gaze, then reached a paw, caught his shoulder and flung him, as if he were a child, at Mullet's feet.

"Better behave, Mansey," commented Mullet. "She's heard what I said. She was old Keith's daughter, remember, and he taught all of them his own tongue. If you speak French now, we might manage——"

He looked at Mansey inquiringly. Mansey shook his head.

"Very little. I do comprehend *'sauve qui peut,'* however, and it seems appropriate to this situation."

"A fine chance," snarled Mullet, as he looked about him. Mansey's gaze followed that survey and again he felt the chill of fear. In the thick tangle of lianas and jungle growth he caught glimpses of gray shapes watching them, swinging in grotesquely airy flight from tree to tree, a company of gray apes, the formidable "men of the woods" known to the world as orang-outangs.

"My harem," was hissed from Mullet's lips. "Each one equipped with the brains of a woman I selected as a wife, sealing her doom at the hands of this she——" The epithets he applied to Sheba were unspeakably vile. Mansey looked in apprehension at Sheba, but her eyes had not changed expression. Evidently there were a good many curses of port dives and docks not included in her knowledge of English. In place of anger, the eyes held something of the love-loyalty seen in the eyes of a faithful dog for its master. She squatted beside Mullet, took his hand and stroked it with her black paw, then held it to her cheek. Mullet jerked it away with an expression of disgust, and the great ape whimpered sorrowfully.

"You see?" snarled Mullet. "Yet we must talk. How about those gramophone records? Start a row going——"

"They're in the launch," said Mansey. "I'll get them." But when he rose, the ape caught his ankle, reaching with no apparent effort, and Mansey was jerked to the ground. Then, throwing back her head, Sheba displayed her fangs in a wide-mouthed and unmistakable grin. Mansey realized that he had walked into a trap, that only by cunning could he escape from the dread company of gray ghouls which Mullet the surgeon loosed in that jungle. Now for the first time he faced greater peril than head-hunting savages seeking trophies or glutting their unquenchable blood-lust against white intruders.

"Wait," said Mullet, then addressed the ape. "You savvy music records?" He made a circular motion with his hand and

nummed a scrap of tune. "You fetchem white man proa 'longside. Savvy?"

Sheba uttered a sound from her throat and swung in swift flight through the trees. Mansey immediately scrambled to his feet and Mullet rose, but before they could take a step there was a circle of great apes hemming them in effectively. They made no attempt to touch either man, but formed a ring and marched about the two prisoners in what might have seemed a ludicrously humorous array if it had not been menacing and sinister.

"Mansey, I'm going out with you. I've got to go. God knows there isn't any other place for me—in white settlements, I mean—but I'll get to another island. They can't cross water. Oh, you can speak now! These are natives, not even very good at *beche de mer* talk. It's that devil of a Sheba who understands and communicates with the others. You heard her just now, calling them. Usually they don't come so close, but your arrival has made her suspicious, no doubt, and she doesn't want to lose me."

His laughter was mirthless and uncanny, the sound of insanity cracking in his voice. Mansey did not wonder. He felt that his own reason would not long stand the strain of this sinister surveillance. Yet what reasoning power was still uncluttered by the impasse in which he found himself, cautioned him against attempting to assist Mullet to escape. The great ape would frustrate such an attempt, he felt sure. And there was danger in releasing a madman like Mullet on any other island, he thought. Aware that his face showed reluctance, he was again frank in speech.

"Mullet, I'm of the opinion that you can't get away, and I must. I could bring help, perhaps. I'll give you my word to do what I can, but for two of us to attempt escape, especially when you have such devoted followers, is utterly futile."

"Look here, don't you fancy for a moment you and that launch will leave this lagoon without me, Mansey. You can't, you know, unless I am willing. Even if you got to the launch, the blacks in their canoes would halt you at the reef entrance. I've had enough of this. Before you came I was making the best of it. I was content enough, only that I wanted a woman. Oh, it's my own doings! Don't think I'm shifting the blame, but at that it was something stronger than my will driving my hand to that delicate operation. If they'd let me alone in London, if they'd seen the marvel of what I'd accomplished, the greatest feat of surgery in this or any other age, I wouldn't be here and this wouldn't have happened. But they drove me out, my own race and kind. And you belong to them, Mansey. I've got a grudge, not against you, but all white men. Mansey"—his voice became quieter, more confidential in tone—"what if we'd take Sheba, you and I, and tour a few countries exhibiting the greatest marvel of the age? We'd need money, and we'd make it. I've lorded it here. I couldn't go back and grub and sweat again. But we could do that——"

"Mullet, either you talk rational or——"

"What will you do? What *can* you do except put a bullet through me, and you'd loose a hell-fury that would tear you bit by bit in rags. I've seen Sheba do that. Finger by finger, Mansey, toe by toe, handfuls of hair, eyelids——"

"Shut up, you beast!" cried Mansey.

"That gets you, eh? Well, it's true. And I'm your only protection. You've got to save me to escape alive."

"What about the natives?"

"Sheba is half native, remember, and she likes her own kind. They're safe. They're not only safe but invulnerable. When they go forth to take wives and heads, the gray apes go along and fight for them. It's a shambles when they leave, Mansey. It has one kick-back,

though." Mullet laughed again and Mansey liked his curses better than his laughter. "The natives don't need to fight and they will in time lose their own initiative, their courage. Some day this tribe won't exist, but that won't come in time to save us."

"Listen, Mullet, suppose I go out and bring help, a revenue cruiser that will blast this village into nothingness as has been done before now. A few shells——"

"Shells won't reach the apes. You'd merely murder the blacks who aren't to blame. Besides, I've no assurance that you'd come back or send them. Who'd believe your story of human apes? And where would I be when they shelled the village? If I went to the hills, the apes would go along. If I stayed here to have them killed I'd get it. What, don't you see I couldn't even kill myself if I felt like heroics to save you, because you'd have Sheba on your neck the minute I croaked? Pretty little mess, eh, Mansey? And there is no escape in the jungles or huts, none at all except to cross the water where the apes can't follow, and you're handicaped there because the natives know just what would happen to them if I'm not here to keep Sheba pacified. I did try getting away with one of my brides in a canoe and Sheba was on watch that night. She tore a *lagi-lagi* to bits, jerked the men to the shore and sent them after me in canoes. Then they gave me to understand I must not try again to escape. Oh, it's a beautiful entanglement! Here's Sheba."

THE great ape dropped from overhanging tree branches and in one arm she carried Mansey's gramophone case, without which he never traveled. It was further proof of the uncanny intelligence of Sheba that she had understood Mullet's command and brought the case. She squatted and deftly unfastened the buckles of leather straps binding the oil-cloth cover, fitted the handle, opened a package of records and wound the machine. In another moment the wail of *She's My Baby Doll* rose in the hot silence. An instant later Mansey shricked laughter of hysteric abandon, for the great she-ape was swaying from one foot to another and gazing at Homer Mullet with the amorous leer of a love-sick crone. She put out a paw to take his hand, but Mullet jerked it aside, and kicked his bare foot at her chest. Lacking his hand to fondle, she seized his foot, precipitated him on his back and cuddled the foot to her breast, laying her cheek against it and fondling each toe as mothers the world over play with toes of their babies.

"Laugh, damn you," growled Mullet. "I'll show you." He spoke in native to Sheba, who reluctantly released his foot, caught Mansey in her arms and, despite his struggles, swung to the tree branches. For all her strength the weight of a fighting man cumbered her movements and she halted her flight to hold him by both arms and shake him until his teeth rattled. Then swinging farther aloft she flung him over the crotch of a branch and dropped to earth.

From below, Mansey heard Mullet's shrieks of mirth. At that elevation he could see the village huts, the lagoon and his launch, the long reef-jaws, and ascending far down the outer beach, the smokes of fires where his Tonga boys cooked their meal. About him were the palms glittering like sabers in the sun, but the jungle was silent, bereft of the gorgeous birds of Paradise, the lorries and parrakeets, the little chattering harmless monkeys. Where the great apes held court, no other jungle life lingered.

Mansey straddled the limb and considered in frantic dismay the situation in which he was placed. Reluctantly, he accepted Mullet's logic. There seemed no escape. Watching glimpses he obtained

of the lagoon through swaying palms and branch plumes, he saw a dark object floating and realized with his heart racing that it was the body of his native left in charge of the boat. Evidently he had angered Sheba and she had killed him without so much as an outcry. Mansey almost envied the dead man. For the first time in his years of Papua he admitted that there were worse things than murder: far worse than the taking and curing of human heads as trade to tourists was the fitting of beast craniums with the brains of thinking humans.

Mansey looked below. The gramophone still wailed its jazz music and foolish songs. The seven great she-apes were dancing clumsily, in contrast to their lithe grace in the trees. Mullet lay prone on the mats, his naked trunk crisscrossed by strings of pearls, his arms over his eyes. Above, Mansey racked his brain to think of a plan of escape. Far off, the black crouching hills quivered in the heat, which was affecting Mansey in spite of a breeze at that elevation which did not penetrate below. He felt thirsty and faint and he knew if he should lose his grip of the tree bole, he would fall to death. His heart and blood began to pound, a throbbing which presently drummed in his ears. Then, suddenly, Tom Mansey knew he heard drums, far off, faint, inaudible to Mullet because of the grinding gramophone diligently kept going by Sheba.

Mansey knew the meaning of the drum-song of Papua, rising, falling, sinister, maddening, the voice coaxed by bare hands from bladderskins stretched over human skulls, and a new fear swooped and rode his shoulders. That drum-song meant savages on the march, and it was coming nearer. He looked below and saw that the she-apes had ceased dancing and stood as if listening through the blatant jazz music to the voice of approaching peril.

In another moment, Sheba had clutched Mullet and shot him to his feet and was chattering a warning. The gramophone record died with a moan, and the drum-song rose insistent as the drone of bees, palpitant as the quivering hills. It roused sleeping natives and the huts belched savages.

They poured from the *lagi-lagi* where they had been sleeping off the night potations, arranging their plume crests as they leaped to earth, young men greedy for battle, eager for slaughter, grimly meticulous over their gaudy ornaments, proud of the fine blue lace of tattooing and blistered cicatrices obtained in agony.

Mullet looked up to where Mansey was hidden in the tree.

"Need help to get down?" he called. "Sheba will fetch you."

Mansey yelled a refusal and began to scramble down, but the great ape swung aloft before he had compassed more than a few feet of the descent. She caught the branch on which he was perched and bent it double, plucked him from his vantage and let the branch go. The crash as it flew back proved the tremendous strength of the beast-woman, and Mansey's heart missed a beat as he was swung in flying leaps and dropped on the mats, unhurt.

"Hear those drums?" began Mullet. "That means reprisal. Now Sheba and her sisters can help my fellows defend the village." He looked at Mansey, and in the bloodshot eyes of Mullet there was a meaning Mansey tried to read because neither dared utter his thoughts in the uncanny hearing of Sheba. Mullet turned to the ape.

"Good Sheba, pretty Sheba. Go after the drums, Sheba. Show the Kauloo warriors they can't fight our fellows. Take the other girls and have a good fight, old girl." He patted her shoulder, and at that careless caress the great ape fawned on him like a grateful cur that has known only kicks and abuse.

THE warriors were dressing for battle in frenzied haste. They scorned to go forth to fight or die in aught but gorgeous array. And a drum-song of their own arose, one drum after another, purling the blood-rousing tempo that stirs the heart and soul of a man, tingles in his flesh, prickles on his scalp, the primal quickening call to war.

Looking at Mullet, Tom Mansey saw hope born in his eyes and thought he understood. They would be rid of the apes for a time. His own thoughts darted to the launch in the lagoon, the Tonga flotilla on the beach outside. Then as he looked seaward Mansey cursed. The Tonga boys had heard that drum-song and understood its meaning. They had no courage. They had launched their canoes, which ranged like slim dark beetles on the sun-glitter of the sea, ready to dart like arrows to safety far beyond. They hovered about the lagoon entrance evidently waiting a hail or sign from Mansey, and he was powerless to reach them.

About the cooking-fire, replenished by old men, began the war dance, and old women fetched gourds of fermented cocoanut wine, which was swigged by the warriors, who smacked their lips loudly and leaped into new frenzy, wild contortions, a hideous Carmagnole in which the she-apes joined, sometimes jumping to catch a tree branch and swing madly, spinning in midair like gibbet-fruit. Then at a sign from the leader, the dancers filed into the jungle, and the great apes leaped to the trees. Where had been a ferocious swarm of painted savages was only the scattered fire embers and the women gathering the empty gourds.

"Now," said Mullet. "now is our chance. We've got the luck of fools. Get to the launch and start it, Mansey, and I'll get the girl. By God, I'd have given Sheba credit for more brains than she showed this time, but the gods are with us."

"Look here, you leave that girl behind, Mullet." Mansey's voice was stern.

"To be killed by the she-ape? What d'you take me for? Not much! I know what'll happen to every living human left in this village when Sheba comes home and finds me gone. There won't be a village. There won't be anything, Mansey, but rubbish, blood-soaked earth and bits of flesh. That girl comes. And there's no time to argue. . . ."

It was the one outstanding fact; they must hasten and get away. Mansey turned and ran to the landing-stage where he had been swung from the launch yesterday. He shortened her painter, dropped in and whirled the wheel. Then his heart sank. The engine was dead and a glance showed him the cunning of Sheba, for she had unscrewed every nut and bolt she could find and emptied his spare gasoline. The cans glittered at the bottom of the lagoon when Mansey looked overside. The ape had taken time to sink them, sink every spare tool and all loose gear she could find. She had even thrust the oars, carried for emergency, into the open jaws of tridacnas, which closed on them. He leaned over, and reaching into the water, wrenched on one, but not all his strength released it. His efforts broke the blade tip and the maimed oar came up in his hands. The second one was beyond his reach.

Some minutes had elapsed in his cursory examination of the launch, but his brain was never so alert before. He thought he might use the maimed oar to scull the unwieldy craft, and stood up to summon the Tonga proas from beyond the reef, for the old men and women of the village were watching him covertly and muttering among themselves. Mansey remembered they did not want Mullet to escape for fear of the great apes' wrath. But they would probably not interfere with him. He faced a decision of saving his own life and leaving Mullet to a hell he had made for

himself, or risking death in the attempt to release Mullet from horror. The choice was wrenched from him when he saw Mullet leap from the bleaching-hut to the ground with the girl on his shoulder, and Mullet's free hand clutched a big navy revolver.

Mansey saw the reason for the gun at once, and his own small automatics were in his hands. For when they saw their erstwhile white master running like a deer for the shore, there was a piercing scream from the natives left behind the war party, and they rushed to hold him on his perilous throne.

Mansey heard the man's warning cry, then the crack of his gun as he cleared a path, shooting as he ran, crashing through the outthrust arms that would have detained him, leaving dead and dying in his wake. He had almost gained the white strip of coral beach from which the landing-stage jutted over the lagoon water, when one courageous old man threw himself headlong and Mullet tripped and crashed to earth, the girl flung from his arms and curled in a heap on the coral. In another moment, Mullet was the center of a heaving, lunging mass of blacks who tried to weight him to earth.

Mansey, in the launch, heard his fists thud on flesh, heard the thud of the gun-butt used as a club, saw black and white arms threshing like flails, then with a mighty heave Mullet was free. A triumphant yell burst from his throat and he leaped toward the shining head of the girl who lay on the sand as she had fallen, evidently knocked unconscious. That yell died in Mullet's throat and Mansey's heart missed a beat, then raced painfully. For from the quivering plumes of trees dropped a gray ghoul shape, screaming horribly in rage, and she flung herself at the white man and sent him spinning with a sweep of her long arm. It was Sheba!

With his brain in a whirl, Mansey realized that if he was ever to get away, it was the crucial moment. Yet, loosing the launch painter, he hesitated. Mullet lay prone on the glistening coral sand, and after a glance at him, Sheba had turned to the girl whose shining brush of curls turned slightly as if consciousness was just returning. One awful scream burst from her throat as the hand of Sheba encircled her throat; then Mansey saw her bright hair through a red mist, for he realized what was going to happen, and saw from his eye corners that Mullet had rolled to his belly on the coral and was taking aim with his gun. Mansey's thoughts darted in wild speculation. Mullet would shoot Sheba, and he need not aim for the girl unless Mullet missed the ape. Otherwise—he shuddered with horror of what would happen in another moment as the hammer of Mullet's gun clicked uselessly, and Sheba, snarling horribly, picked up the girl as if she were a rag doll.

Mansey's gun cracked twice. He felt sick, revolting with nausea, for the girl's body hung limp in the ape's paws, and on her golden skin two bright soft ribbons spurted and flowed. She was beyond pain. But Mullet was creeping soundlessly, cautiously on his belly over the coral, making for the landing-stage.

MANSEY loosed the painter, held the launch by his clutch of the nearest post, kept his gun aimed at the head of Sheba, trying in spite of the red mist over his sight to point for the base of her brain, afraid to risk a shot lest he should miss and she would be upon them with lightning speed.

He had time to think how marvelously the rapid-fire passing of events had shaped for this get-away. Without the sudden arrival of Sheba, the natives would have prevented their escape; and if Mansey had not insisted on bringing the girl, Sheba's attention would never have been distracted

by this opportunity to glut jealous rage on her rival in the affections of Mullet. The great ape was extremely, dreadfully engrossed. Mansey tried not to see what she did, tried to believe it was a rag doll in the hands of a mischievous pet. He was bracing himself with all his will to override the violent upheaval that swept to his eyes and brain, while Mullet crept toward the launch.

Far off the drum-song was muffled, like the croon of surf on coral. Beyond the reef his Tonga boys waited. Another two minutes and Mullet would tumble into the craft. Already Mansey had braced the broken oar-tip against the planks to shove out. They must widen the water between themselves and Sheba. Mansey wondered, in a vague, darting thought, if orang-outangs could not swim, and remembered that before this trans-elementation the human body of Sheba was probably adept and strong in the water.

Mullet was on the landing-stage. Mansey heard the planks creak, but Sheba seemed to hear nothing but her own animal snarling at the dreadful task presented her. She was almost finished. Her arm swept out and held aloft something pitiful with long bright hair which she played with and stroked. Then from far out beyond the reef one of Mansey's boys hailed his master. Mansey's whole body jerked as if his nerves were strings of a puppet snatched by a crude hand.

"Marster, Marster!"

Mullet lunged as Sheba was on her feet. The launch careened crazily as he plunged in and Mansey heaved on the oar, then tried to propel the craft from the stern. One wild screech of baffled rage rang and echoed between the jungle-clad reef-prongs, and swinging the head by its long hair, Sheba sailed through the air, flung herself from the landing-stage into the water and swam after the boat.

Mullet was yelling and chattering like a madman. His gun was gone and he had seized Mansey's automatics and sent a sharp fusillade at the swimming ape. If Sheba was hit, the lead pellets did not halt her. Mansey, sculling frantically at the stern, saw her fangs bared, heard her snarls, stared in horror as his muscles cracked with the strain of propelling the tubby launch, at the long, gray, hairy ghoul which gained on them so rapidly that the boat might have been anchored for all headway they seemed to make.

A mighty lunge, and Sheba's paw caught the stern, seized the oar with which he tried to batter her off, and wrenched it from his grasp. Then Mansey threw himself on the combing as the ape's weight almost swamped them. Mullet was screaming, fighting, kicking as the paws seized him, dragged him from his clutch of the planks and hauled him, still struggling, into the sea.

For a moment there was a wild upheaval, and the clear lagoon water churned in foam that was blood-streaked. Mullet's shots had hit the she-ape, but that great body had the strength and endurance of an elephant. Yet in another moment, Mansey saw that Sheba was badly wounded, for her lips dripped redly and her eyes showed glassy.

Mullet was clasped in one arm and she tried to swim with the other. Beside the body of Mullet trailed a head with bright hair, and Mansey, helpless to avert further tragedy, sick with the shock of dread, clung to the launch combing, watching Sheba suddenly cease swimming and sink beneath the lagoon water, with Mullet in her grasp.

The ripples spread in rings, the bubbles broke. Through water clear as air, Mansey saw the gray ghoul go down, feet first, with the white man still struggling futilely. Then as the hairy gray shape parted sea-fern fronds until her foot touched a vantage by which she might have shot her

body to the surface, there was a further commotion in the sea-gardens, a violent upheaval writhing below, a line of bubbles ascending, breaking soundlessly as the souls of man and she-ape escaped.

Mansey stared. He knew. Sheba's foot had touched the tinted flesh flanges of a giant tridacna and it had closed like a steel trap.

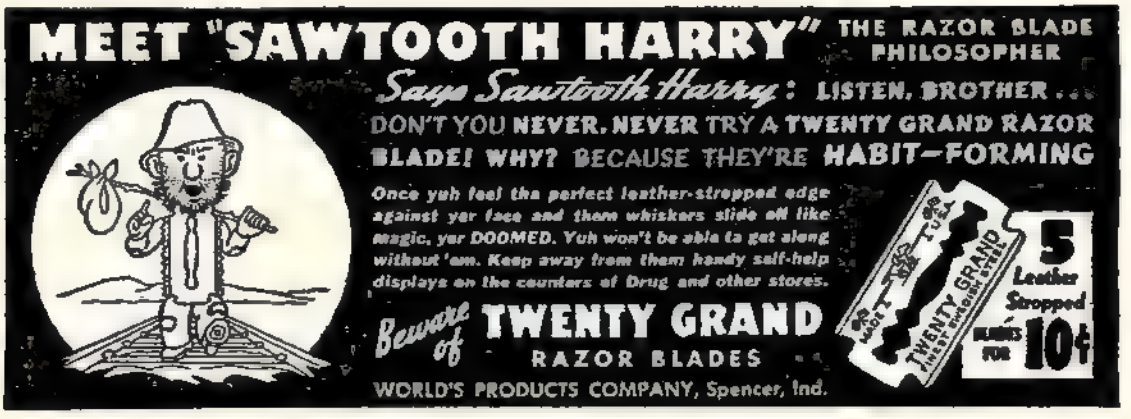
Not even in the death agony had she released her embrace of the man whom in human shape she had loved so fiercely that she took him with her to a transelementation far removed from reach of those bunglers who trifle with the doors of life and death.

THE hot sun blazed down on a man inert, limp as a rag, lying on the launch bottom, and presently the Tonga boys who saw the launch put out, came to investigate.

They were some weeks towing the disabled launch to port, and during that time Tom Mansey recovered from a siege of sub-consciousness and fever in which he raved and fought a nightmare jungle peopled with gray ghouls. And when some time later he made a report to the authorities, it contained prophecy and prediction.

"It is fairly well established that wherever the white man goes, it means elimination of the savage, not by slaughter, of course. We have subtler ways. And the higher type of skill and brains you send in, the quicker you set the death-dealing forces to work among the natives. Compared with one courageous, brainy white man, cobras, crocodiles, tigers, any of the jungle terrors are simple and innocuous. I know. As regards moneyed idiots who were promoting head barter, fine them enough and jail them. Cut off the demand and you kill the supply."

They rewarded Mansey rather well for that investigation, although in the launch bottom the Tonga boys gathered a king's ransom in pearls from strands which broke as Mullet struggled to escape death. They were rather honest Tonga boys and only thieved half of the pearls to divide among themselves, but Mansey is embarrassed. Pearls belong to the throats of pretty women, but those pearls held memories too horrid to give to a nice girl; so he is waiting to trade them to curio-hunters disappointed at lack of mummied human heads.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THE EYRIE

BEGINNING with this issue, the price of WEIRD TALES is reduced to fifteen cents. This marks a radical departure, for the price has always been twenty-five cents. We have long contemplated this step, which will put the magazine in the hands of thousands of new readers. We believe that WEIRD TALES is the best buy in fiction on the newsstands today—at any price. All of our regular readers know that the quality of WT has remained at an amazingly high level year in and year out since it was founded some sixteen years ago. There will be no falling off in the quality of the stories; it is only the price that is changing. All subscriptions will be automatically extended.

Better and Better

G. Ken Chapman writes from London, England: "I do not often write you, although I have been a steady and constant reader for many years now, but I feel that I really must congratulate you upon the progress that WEIRD TALES has achieved since the publication came to New York City. Quite apart from the fact that the number of pages has increased, I have seen a gradual improvement in the matter, at all times immaculate, until now a brilliant level has been reached. Of the more recent issues, I enjoyed *The Thinking Machine* by Connington very much indeed, whilst Quinn always turns out a story chockfull of interest. Earlier in the year I was delighted to see the return of Donald Wandrei to fantasy-fiction, and his *Giant-Plasm* was a full justification of the faith I have in him to always 'produce the goods.' I am overjoyed to read of the return of C. L. Moore, whose work is of really top ranking, and helps, to a great extent, to submerge my grief at the loss of Lovecraft and Howard, so quickly upon one another, a little while back."

For Eleven Years

Mrs. Jean Madison writes from Springfield Gardens, Long Island: "This is my first letter to you. I have read WEIRD TALES for eleven years. Also I have *saved* them for ten years. Out of ten years I have only lost two magazines. When I'm ill or not feeling up to par, I read back numbers. I've always liked your stories—some maybe not so much. But I read all of the magazine when I get it—any of your stories are too good to pass up. I liked Brundage covers better than Finlay. I rather liked the nude covers. But then I know I bought the magazine to *read*, not look at pictures. Last June-July issue had me scared. I thought you were starting that every two months stuff again! It seems too long to wait for a magazine from you. I get other magazines, but do not save them. When I first read WEIRD TALES I wouldn't dare sleep without a light; now I find that's the best time to read—in bed *with* light—and I sleep *without* the light. . . . Keep up the good stories."

Price 15 Cents

Donald Allgeier writes from Springfield, Missouri: "I regret very much to see WT miss an issue as it does in July. I can't understand why this should be when WT is so much better than any of its competitors—truly the aristocrat of fantastic fiction. Maybe

it's the price. WT is the highest-priced pulp magazine I know of. Of course I know from long experience that its contents are worth far more than the price. However, the price may keep new readers away. I wonder if you've considered lowering the price and reducing the size—though not the quality. It seems to me that 160 pages is too much anyway. Surely you'll run short of material, printing so many stories each issue. The stories have continued to be swell so far, though. The foregoing no doubt sounds strange, coming from one who has been a loyal supporter of WT for nine years. That I have read it that long shows my feelings toward the publication. Any criticism is made in the friendliest spirit. Congratulations on your acquisition of a fine new artist. Harry Ferman is a genius almost as great as Finlay. Incidentally Finlay's current poetic illustration is tops. The June-July cover puzzles me. It seems to be a composite of several stories, but I can't place the gentleman with the sword and torch in any of the stories. The best story in this issue is *Almuric* by the never-to-be-sufficiently-lamented Howard. *Far Below* and *The Man Who Came Back* take second and third, with *Headache* close behind. I've been very disappointed in your feature stories recently. *The Hollow Moon* lacked a lot of measuring up to advance publicity. And *Giants of Anarchy* is pure drivel—worst in the issue. I like science-fiction when it's well done, but this is hack writing. Every situation is stereotyped. The Binder boys should bow their heads in shame. I'm glad to see Cave again, though his current story is far from being another *Dead Man's Belt.* Moore was in fine fettle on her return. *Hellsgarde* was the best in a long time. Why not revive Rald and Elak of Atlantis? Bryan's and Peirce's short stories are worthy of mention. Again de Grandin keeps Quinn from writing his best. The de Grandinless *Washington Nocturne* was great."

Unweird

R. Wetzel of South Orange, New Jersey, writes: "For well onto fifteen years I have been reading your magazine, reading the stories without the least comment, and now I feel that I might be authorized, as well as any other reader of your publication, to write and tell you how I consider your magazine at present. The first ten years I have always got more than I paid for your magazine, and now I feel that I get just what I pay—twenty-five cents! May I proceed and tell why, taking apart your present issue? Virgil Finlay:—Without a doubt he is a credit to your pages. His pen-and-ink drawings are what your pages long lacked. But his covers are not typical of WEIRD TALES. Please retain the old cover illustrator, and maintain Finlay's splendid 'tween-cover illustrations. Seabury Quinn:—Having read his stories ever since I can remember, I can say little. If he wasn't good he would not be between your pages. His two inseparable characters are an institution! I can go on and number the many illustrators and good writers, but that would take pages. Finlay, I add, is the best page illustrator you have ever added—but however never change the heading of Weird Story Reprint and The Eyrie. My complaint is brief. Of late years your stories have been leaving the WEIRD policy and creeping little by little toward the future. *Giants of Anarchy* by Eando Binder leaves me quite cold. Tell me, what was 'weird' about that story? . . . Typical of WEIRD (and always finding satisfaction in yours truly) is Peirce's *Stroke of Twelve,* Johnson's *Far Below,* Bryan's *Sitter in the Mound,* Smith's *Willow Landscape,* and I have already mentioned Quinn's ability."

Ugly-looking Beasts

Caroline Ferber writes from Chicago: "Late again this time—dunno when I'll ever catch up to myself, but will give a few words on the July issue. Ugly-looking beasts, gargoyles what-is-'ems on the cover—ghastly, to say the least—colorful, at any rate. Eando Binder's *Giants of Anarchy* was amusing and exciting—but not so really weird. I'm still waiting for a repeat of one of those lovely and beautiful tales the brothers Binder can turn out. Now *The Sitter in the Mound* was really an egger-oner. Indian mounds are a favorite topic—sorta chawed my nails a bit to know if the mound had caved in by the next day and what was about the skeleton's neck and so on. If I weren't doggoned tired

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of hearing about dictators, I would have liked *The Man Who Came Back* much better. However, it was a tenser—and just think how happy the lassie was to have her loved one back. Ferman's full-page drawing isn't at all bad—almost like a chaotic dream—or something one would see from a machine such as Vettner had. Ah—*Mansions in the Sky* showed some good material, although of a type somewhat different. Quinn now used the dead as a friendly influence. Finlay's drawing is beautiful. Smith gave us a tenderly sweet fantasy with his *Willow Landscape*, unlike so many of his tales. This is really lovely—one I will remember for a long time. *Almuric* soars to new heights in this second installment. All the more tragic that Howard didn't stay with us long enough to give us the entire tale. Lovecraft still takes the top for curious names—his *Celephais* shows that again. I wonder if he expressed in this the longing that is deep-seated in us—the dream world into which we retire when troubled or weary, and build air castles. Well, we'll cut this short again this month and hope to be back to my madcap style next time."

Bored by Jules

Richard Kraft writes from Elizabeth, New Jersey: "Just finished the August WT after four straight hours of delightful reading. First honors this month go to Bruce Bryan and his *Return from Death*. A darn good climax! Bob Bloch, as usual, contributes an entertaining piece of fiction: *The Totem-Pole* takes second. After due deliberation I concede Wellman's yarn over Hart's for third. And may I argue definitely and passionately against science-fiction? It has no place in WEIRD! Another thing: although Seabury Quinn is one of my favorite authors, I do wish he'd drop de Grandin to a definite minority and concentrate on his non-de Grandin stories. Jules, with his sayings and such, is becoming quite a bore to me."

Rebuttal

Seabury Quinn writes from Washington, D. C.: "Just a line in rebuttal of Joseph A. Lovchik's 'correction' concerning *Washington Nocturne*. Says friend Lovchik: '. . . it is

stated that officers in the A. E. F. wore no identification or "dog tags." This is wrong, I have upon good authority.' Vas you dere, Joie? Well, *I was,* and officers did *not* wear dog tags, which were small discs of aluminum bearing the soldier's serial number. Officers have no serial numbers, and dog tags were not issued to them. They were permitted, at their own expense, to have bracelets with their name, rank and arm of service, together with their unit, engraved upon them, but these had to be changed if they were transferred from one outfit to another. Also (especially in scout patrol work) they were required to remove all indicia of units from their persons and uniforms before going over. It was for this reason that I was careful to have both the officers killed by shell fire—so that their hands were blown away and all possibility of their bracelets being found removed. And in conclusion I leave off as I began. Officers did *not* wear dog tags."

Bloch Missing

Marjorie Brown writes from Milwaukee: "If I could ever hope to write half as well as Lovecraft I'd know the true meaning of satisfaction! It was a long while before I could actually make myself believe that he had passed away. In my estimation his work ranks far beyond that of Poe, and Poe, I know, would be hard to beat. I heard that Derleth was working on a collection of Lovecraft. I hope that this is true, and that the publication will not be delayed. . . . I was sorry not to find a story by Bloch in the July issue. Of course I thought Lovecraft's dream story beautifully written; Ernst's is certainly amusing; and Earl Peirce, Jr., I feel handled a difficult story in a masterly manner. His phrases seemed to hold the perfect shade of expression. I'm not so well acquainted with him, and would like to see more of his work. A swell issue! But let's have more of Bloch."

Science-Fiction

John F. Burke writes from Liverpool, England: "I am very sorry to note that you are attempting to 'crash' the science-fiction market. Fond as I am of science-fiction, it is possible to get plenty of that elsewhere, without your

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taking up space to give us yet more, when we are already surfeited. Please cut out some of your science-fiction, unless it be of such high quality as Kuttner's *The Transgressor*, a really excellent short story." [We are not trying to 'crash' the science-fiction field. A story of science-fiction must be weird or fantastic, in the opinion of the editor, to be printed in WT.—THE EDITOR.]

Conan Reprints

Sheldon Benscoter writes from East Mauch Chunk, Pennsylvania: "I started reading your magazine in January, 1937, and my only regret is that I did not start sooner. One of the first stories I read was H. P. Lovecraft's *The Thing on the Doorstep*, and it certainly sold me on your magazine. I noticed that a great many of your readers mentioned the merits of the Conan stories. I tried to secure some back numbers but I only succeeded in getting one complete story and part of a serial; needless to say they merely whetted my appetite. When you announced your intention to reprint the Conan stories I hoped it would be soon. It seems ages since you made that announcement. Please slip in a few illustrations by Virgil Finlay when you do. I hope you will continue to reprint more of Lovecraft's stories; they are unbeatable for sheer weirdness. More stories by Robert Bloch. What does he use in his pen? Blood! Let's have more about Clifford Ball's hero, Rald. He certainly is a likable devil. *The Dark Isle* by Robert Bloch was the best story in the May issue and Johnson's *Far Below* took top honors in last month's magazine."

Don't Reprint Poe

Raymond Ripa writes from Newport, Rhode Island: "This letter is prompted by a brief perusal of the August WT, just out today. Your reprints consistently ranking among the best stories of each issue, I eagerly looked to see what was in store for me this month. My enthusiasm was dashed to the ground when I saw the title *The Fall of the House of Usher*. Now, don't misunderstand me. I have long been an ardent admirer of Poe. In fact, I believe I have read everything he ever wrote. 'Ah, there's the rub!' Poe's works are easily obtainable at every public library. Many of

his stories (especially *The Fall*—etc.) are studied in our high schools. Thus I believe that the great majority of your readers will join with me in urging you to restrict the reprints to stories from the early issues of WEIRD TALES. My second squawk concerns illustrations. Those in the June-July issue hit an all-time high, with both Finlay and Ferman doing a great job. But what a let-down in this issue! You seem to be returning to the half or quarter-page illustrations. *Don't!* For my part, I would prefer full-page illustrations for each of the longer stories, even at the cost of excluding one of the shorts. But worst of all, two of the principal stories have no illustrations at all. Is your head bowed in shame, Editor Wright? Well, don't feel too bad; just watch yourself in the future." [Couldn't be helped this time, Mister; the artist who was to illustrate those two stories injured his wrist, and printer's deadlines wait for no man.] "With the above off my chest, I will conclude with a few random thoughts. Best recent stories: *Return of Hastur, Susette, Celephais, Hellsgarde, Willow Landscape, Quest of Iranon.* . . . Please, keep all science-fiction out of WT. Don't print the entire contents on the cover. And finally, let me plead for at least an occasional cover by Brundage. I assure you that the above criticisms are offered with the best interests of my favorite magazine, WEIRD TALES, at heart."

Such Praise!

Julian Wolfenstein writes from New York City: "Surely, amidst all the wealth of praise in the Eyrie, you could find place for one slightly in the other direction. Anyway, I have been mentally dictating this letter for years, and this seems to be as good a time as any to write it. Let's take the letters to the Eyrie. Such praise! Such adulation! If the stories themselves only matched it, you would be the possessors of a fortune in original manuscripts. If a story is good, it leaves a pleasant tingling feeling within me, but I hate to pick up a later issue and read that the story was 'superb,' 'sublime,' 'better than Poe,' or, heaven help us, 'oogie.' Such letters look better in the Editor's Hope Chest than in print. A word about your covers. Now

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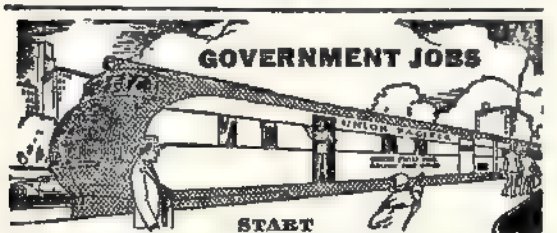

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that the wide-eyed nudes have been rejected, your covers are filled with grotesque monsters. Why? . . . Wouldn't a nice dignified cover do just as well? Something that would make it stand out from the run-of-the-mill thrillers. You might caution your illustrators to use caution as to what part of a story they depict. Too often a story has been spoiled for me because the artist has 'given away' the point in his picture."

A WT Club

Allen R. Baker writes from Cleveland, Ohio: "Great as WEIRD TALES has proved in the past, it assumes an utterly new aspect with the announcement that the August issue contains a story by P. Schuyler Miller, *Spawn*. I *know* Miller's work; count on me for lifetime reading, if his stories are to be printed in WEIRD TALES. We readers in Cleveland are forming a club to discuss the stories in your unusual magazine. Readers wishing to co-operate in the formation of this club are advised to contact the undersigned immediately, for further discussion. More of Bloch! Also, waiting for Miller." [Mr. Baker's address in Cleveland is: 3562 E. 140th Street.]

The Editorial Ear

Herbert Vincent Ross writes from London, England: "Your editorial in the January issue made fine reading after the scare we all had with the change in publisher. I guess we all had the idea you were going to change the old magazine, but now we can breathe freely once again! I quite agree with you when you say: 'Any other policy would be suicidal.' It would! So Finlay is back and again the finest magazine of the weird published today lives again, and takes on some of its old 'class.' I'm afraid I'm a keen critic of anything you do and have done in the past, but please believe I intend it to be constructive and not destructive, as I know you have a pretty hard job of work to do in trying to please all of us, all of the time. You do a good job anyway, and a real democratic spirit seems to surround WT, its staff, writers and readers. What I mean is that we the readers really do feel we have a hand in things; we've only got to ask hard enough and in sufficient numbers and lo and behold the editorial ear is attuned! I still don't care for the rough

paper as compared with the older, nor the new style type, but these are at least minor things. I think I am always a bit behind as a critic, but I try to make a point of reading all the 'fantasy' mags. When I look at some of the new s.f. magazines I wonder if they will all survive? Anyway competition is certainly good from the reader's point of view, and was there ever a time when we had such wide variety of good fantasy? I see nothing however which could menace WT as a magazine for all-round fantasy, weird and science fiction. . . . I am one of those readers who do not sigh for the return of Brundage; for me keep Finlay on the covers; look at his work whilst the magazine is on the newsstand, and *see* how his work sticks out a mile. The expressions on the faces of the issue for January were what the writer intended to convey, and it took an *artist* to capture it. A fine cover and a fine artist inside or out. More by Finlay and keep the covers weird as this one was; we can do without the impressions the nudes give on the covers. Only in this issue a reader remarks on how she passed up the magazine because the nudes gave her the wrong idea about the stories inside. . . . A great line-up of writers in this issue also, but I'm afraid my choice for first will be a most unpopular one; anyway here goes: *These Doth the Lord Hate,* by Gans T. Field, a real weird tale."

Most Popular Story

Readers, which story do you like best in this issue? Send a letter or a postcard to The Eyrie, WEIRD TALES, 9 Rockefeller Plaza, New York City. We invite criticism. The most popular story in the June-July issue, as shown by your votes and letters, was Robert Barbour Johnson's macabre tale of horror in the New York subway, *Far Below.*

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Books by Lovecraft, Merritt, Quinn, etc., rented by mail. 3c a day plus postage. Write for free list. WEREWOLF LENDING LIBRARY, 227-K So. Atlantic Avenue, Pittsburgh, Pa.

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THE OUTSIDER AND OTHERS will be published for distribution sometime in December of this year, in an edition tentatively set at 1,000 copies, many of which are already subscribed. If ordered immediately, before publication, the book will cost Lovecraft's fans $3.50 the copy, including postage. If ordered after publication, $5.00. Order now. Checks and money orders should be sent to August Derleth, Sauk City, Wisconsin.

COMING NEXT MONTH

EVEN FROM A DISTANCE the shining object's position seemed indefinably queer—on a slight mound rising from the slime. Now, at about a hundred yards, I could see plainly despite the engulfing mist just what that mound was. It was the body of a man in one of the Crystal Company's leather suits, lying on his back, and with his oxygen mask half buried in the mud a few inches away. In his right hand, crushed convulsively against his chest, was the crystal which had led me here—a spheroid of incredible size, so large that the dead fingers could scarcely close over it. Even at the given distance I could see that the body was a recent one. There was little visible decay, and I reflected that in this climate such a thing meant death not more than a day before. Soon the hateful far north-flies would begin to cluster about the corpse.

I wondered who the man was. Surely no one I had seen on this trip. It must have been one of the old-timers absent on a long roving commission, who had come to this especial region independently of Anderson's survey. There he lay, past all trouble, and with the rays of the great crystal streaming out from between his stiffened fingers.

For fully five minutes I stood there staring in bewilderment and apprehension. A curious dread assailed me, and I had an unreasonable impulse to run away. It could not have been done by those slinking man-lizards, for he still held the crystal he had found. Was there any connection with the invisible wall? Where had he found the crystal? I now began to regard the unseen barrier as something sinister, and recoiled from it with a shudder. Yet I knew I must probe the mystery all the more quickly and thoroughly because of this recent tragedy.

Suddenly, wrenching my mind back to the problem I faced, I thought of a possible means of testing the wall's height, or at least of finding whether or not it extended indefinitely upward. . . .

The curious and awful thing that happened to the explorer within the invisible walls makes a fascinating narrative, replete with interest and tragedy. This superb novelette, of which the late great master of weird fiction, H. P. Lovecraft, was one of the authors, will be printed complete in the October WEIRD TALES.

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